

# The Impact of Parenting Styles on Subjective Well-Being among College Students in Zhejiang Province

Qin Hua and Wei Hui Suan

**Abstract** – This study explores the influence of parenting styles on subjective well-being (SWB) of college students in Zhejiang Province, and reveals the dynamic adjustment paths in parenting practices by combining the dual perspectives of regional culture and gender differences. The study found that the general low happiness of college students in Zhejiang Province is closely related to the imbalance of family parenting styles. Using a mixed-methods design, the study demonstrated that authoritative parenting significantly increased SWB through "dynamic affective negotiation", while authoritarian parenting exacerbated anxiety, especially in the male group. The negative effects of permissive parenting on SWB were particularly pronounced in females, reflecting the implicit constraints of social gender role discipline. The study further found that parenting styles in Zhejiang Province was influenced by both traditional culture and commercial competition, and was characterized by "academic centrism", with the scope of authoritative parenting narrowed down to the instrumental negotiation of academic goals and the neglect of support for autonomy in non-academic areas. Gender difference analysis showed that males were more likely to externalize stress due to "rigid role" expectations, while females internalized anxiety and faced a higher risk of well-being. This study proposes to build a "family-school-society" collaborative intervention system: families need to implement regionalized practices of authoritative parenting, balancing rules and emotions; schools need to design gender-sensitive emotional literacy curricula and accurate psychological counselling; and society needs to break the utilitarian educational stereotypes through the reconstruction of cultural narratives, policy protection, and economic incentives. The results of the study provide theoretical and empirical evidence for optimizing the practice of family education and improving the mental health of college students.

**Keywords** – parenting styles, subjective well-being, gender differences, college students in Zhejiang Province, authoritative parenting

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *Background of the Study*

With the intensification of social competition and the increase of educational pressure, the proportion of college student groups facing mental health problems has been increasing year by year. As a core indicator of mental health, Subjective Well-Being reflects an individual's overall evaluation of the quality of life, including emotional experience (positive and negative emotions) and cognitive judgment (life satisfaction). Studies have found that college students' subjective well-being is closely related to their

academic achievement, social adaptability and psychological health. However, college students' well-being is generally low, and psychological problems such as anxiety and depression are frequent, so it is urgent to explore their influencing factors from the perspective of family education.

Parenting style is a key factor in the psychological development of an individual. According to Baumrind's (1967) classic categorization, authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles have profound effects on children's self-regulation, emotional stability, and social adjustment. Authoritative parenting (highly responsiveness, reasonably demanding) are thought to be most conducive to fostering high self-esteem and positive psychological resilience, whereas authoritarian (highly demanding, low responsiveness) and permissive (low demanding, high responsiveness) parenting styles may trigger low self-esteem or behavioural problems (Çiçek, 2021; Xie, 2023). Existing research has focused mostly on the child or adolescent stage, with insufficient attention paid to college student populations, and has less frequently explored the moderating role of gender differences in parenting outcomes. For example, females may be more susceptible to the positive effects of authoritative parenting due to their high sensitivity to emotional support, while males may suppress negative emotions due to societal expectations of "rigid roles" in authoritarian parenting. Such gender-differentiated psychological adaptation pathways suggest that the relationship between parenting style and well-being needs to be systematically deconstructed in relation to gender roles.

In addition, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes family harmony and academic achievement, and Zhejiang Province, as an economically developed region with fierce competition in education, has high parental expectations, which may result in unique parenting patterns. However, there is still a lack of research, especially empirical analyses of the interactions between culture, parenting styles, and gender differences.

Therefore, combining the dual perspectives of cultural background and gender differences, exploring the mechanism of parenting styles on the subjective well-being of college students in Zhejiang Province can not only improve the cultural adaptability of family upbringing theories, but also provide a scientific basis for gender-sensitive psychological interventions, which is of significant theoretical and practical value.

### *Theoretical Significance*

Expanding the research perspectives of subjective well-being: Existing literature mostly explores college students' well-being from the perspectives of personal traits or social support, this study completes the theoretical framework of subjective well-being by introducing the variable of parenting styles and revealing the continuous influence of

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family environment on psychological development in early adulthood.

Revealing gender and cultural specificity: By comparing and focusing on regional cultures in Zhejiang Province by gender, the study can reveal the differentiated effects of parenting styles on male and female students, as well as the intertwined roles of traditional values and modern educational philosophies, providing new evidence for gender psychology and cross-cultural research.

#### *Practical Significance*

Guiding family education practices: The findings of the study provide parents with a scientific basis for advocating authoritative parenting style and reducing over-controlling or permissive behaviours, so as to optimize parent-child interaction patterns and enhance children's psychological resilience.

Optimize psychological interventions in colleges: educators can design targeted counselling programs based on the student's family background, such as self-esteem enhancement training to mitigate the negative effects of authoritarian parenting or social support programs to compensate for the deficiencies of permissive parenting.

Promoting social policy formulation: The study calls on the government and social institutions to pay attention to the quality of family education, promote parent education programs, and create a healthy family and social environment through gender equality policies that reduce the constraints of traditional gender roles on psychological development.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite their excellent performance in academic and career development, the subjective well-being of college students in Zhejiang Province is generally low. This paradoxical phenomenon is closely related to the parenting styles, specifically manifested in the following three aspects:

*Imbalance in upbringing: the absence of authoritative parenting and the negative effects of extreme tactics*

According to Baumrind's (1967) classic classification, authoritative parenting (highly responsiveness, reasonable demands) has been shown to significantly enhance individuals' emotional stability and social adaptability (Wu et al., 2021), but under the high pressure of competition in Zhejiang Province, most families are caught in the dilemma of polarized parenting strategies. On the one hand, the over-control of authoritarian parenting (e.g., high-pressure policies of "grades first") has led to students' chronic anxiety and impeded emotional expression (Ren et al., 2024). For example, some parents deprive their children of space to explore their interests through "fill-in-the-blank" educational planning, causing them to question the meaning of life. On the other hand, the emotional neglect of permissive parenting (e.g., providing only material support without behavioural guidance) weakens students' goal orientation and leaves them isolated with deflated values (Leung & Man, 2023). Although the authoritative parenting model is widely advocated, the synergistic mechanism of

"rule negotiation" and "emotional support" is difficult to implement under the drive of utilitarian goals.

*Increased cultural conflict: tension between traditional values and modern aspirations*

Zhejiang Province's "business tradition" and the culture of "learning and excellence" have profoundly influenced the utilitarian goals of family education (Chao, 1994). Parents often view their children's academic achievements as "family capital appreciation" and reinforce control through financial rewards and

punishments (e.g., cost of living linked to grades). This cultural pressure intensifies intergenerational conflict: traditional career expectations (e.g., inheriting the family business) are in opposition to youth's values of self-fulfilment (Huang et al., 2024). Research suggests that the "business investment logic" of Zhejiang families reduces happiness to "economic returns" and neglects the fulfilment of emotional needs (Huang, 2023).

*Significant gender differences: systematic differentiation of role regulation and emotional needs*

Gender role expectations are transmitted through parenting styles, leading to significant differences in the psychological adjustment pathways of male and female students (Li et al., 2022). The male group faces "rigid roles" (e.g., achievement pressure to "honor the family"), and the high-control strategies of authoritarian parenting force them to suppress negative emotions and turn to externalized behaviours (e.g., Internet addiction) to alleviate anxiety (Yaffe, 2023). Females are bound by "implicit discipline" (e.g., "stability-first" expectations), internalized anxiety is exacerbated by the lack of emotional support in permissive parenting (e.g., perfectionist tendencies), and is glorified by society as a pressure to be "delicate" and difficult to seek help (Treviño et al., 2021). Research suggests that women's high sensitivity to emotional support makes them more susceptible to the positive influences of authoritative parenting, but the reality is that such support is often squeezed by utilitarian goals (Çiçek, 2021; Usán Supervía et al., 2023).

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

*Theoretical Evolution of Parenting Styles and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*

The three-dimensional model of parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) proposed by Baumrind (1967) laid the theoretical foundation for research on child socialization. Subsequent studies have further expanded this framework, revealing the multidimensional impact of parenting styles on individual development. Authoritative parenting (high responsiveness and reasonable demands) is widely regarded as the optimal model. By balancing emotional support and rule guidance, it significantly enhances adolescents' self-esteem and social adaptability (Wu et al., 2021). Abidin et al. (2022) further emphasized that authoritative parents employ "autonomy empowerment" strategies to meet adolescents'

psychological needs (e.g., competence and belonging), thereby promoting long-term improvement in subjective well-being (SWB). This parenting style is also associated with higher emotional intelligence, helping adolescents flexibly navigate social and academic challenges (Yadav et al., 2021). Authoritarian parenting (high demands and low responsiveness), however, emphasizes obedience and control, leading to increased anxiety and reduced self-efficacy in children (Yadav et al., 2021). A longitudinal study by Ren et al. (2024) found that authoritarian parenting has cumulative negative effects on adolescents' emotional regulation abilities, with long-term high-pressure environments potentially triggering depressive tendencies and externalizing behaviours (e.g., internet addiction). Permissive parenting (low demands and high responsiveness), while providing emotional warmth, often results in vague life goals and lower life satisfaction among adolescents due to a lack of behavioural guidance (Leung & Man, 2023). Guijarro Gallego et al. (2021) demonstrated that the negative effects of permissive parenting are weaker in individualistic cultures, but in collectivist cultures, children may experience intensified self-doubt due to social comparison pressures.

Recent research has focused on the cultural adaptability of parenting styles. Chao (1994) introduced the concept of "training" to describe the uniqueness of Chinese family parenting, where parents cultivate children's "social competitiveness" through intensive supervision and achievement-oriented strategies. This model combines the rule-based nature of authoritative parenting with utilitarian control. Zhejiang Province, a region in China known for its developed private economy and intense educational competition, exhibits an "academic-centric" characteristic in family parenting practices. Empirical research by Huang (2023) revealed that Zhejiang parents often narrow authoritative parenting to a "tool for academic goal negotiation," where emotional support is solely aimed at boosting exam performance, deviating from the classical theoretical framework. Xie (2023) further highlighted intergenerational differences in Chinese adolescents' perceptions of authoritative parenting: children prioritize "emotional accessibility," while parents focus on "rule enforcement efficiency," a cognitive misalignment that may weaken the positive effects of authoritative parenting.

#### *Multidimensionality of Subjective Well-Being and Cultural Specificity*

Diener's (1984) two-dimensional model of subjective well-being (SWB) (life satisfaction and emotional balance) remains the core paradigm in current research. Life satisfaction reflects individuals' cognitive evaluation of their overall life, while emotional balance encompasses the ratio of positive to negative emotions (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Cross-cultural studies indicate significant cultural differences in the mechanisms influencing SWB: in collectivist cultures, family bonds and fulfilment of responsibilities contribute more to SWB than personal achievements (Diener et al., 2010). For instance, Germani et al. (2021) found that Chinese adolescents prioritize "family harmony" as the primary source of happiness, whereas Western peers emphasize "personal freedom."

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a deeper explanatory framework for cultural differences in SWB. The theory posits that the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and belongingness—serves as the core driver of SWB. However, in Zhejiang's high-pressure educational ecosystem, these needs often face structural conflicts: parents enhance children's "competence" through intensive academic supervision but sacrifice "autonomy" (e.g., exploration of personal interests); "belongingness" becomes difficult to achieve due to the instrumentalization of family interactions (e.g., emotional discussions limited to academic performance) (Wang, 2022). Treviño et al. (2021) found during the pandemic that college students in Zhejiang commonly experienced "belongingness deprivation," manifested as heavy reliance on virtual socialization, highlighting the insufficiency of family emotional support.

Recent studies have explored gender differences in SWB mechanisms. Li et al. (2022) revealed that Chinese women's SWB is more influenced by family emotional quality, while men's SWB is closely tied to achievement attainment. This divergence aligns with societal gender role expectations: women are assigned the role of "family emotional maintainers," making their happiness susceptible to parent-child communication quality, whereas men bind their SWB to external evaluations due to "rigid achievement expectations" (Yaffe, 2023).

#### *Interactive Effects of Regional Culture and Gender Differences*

The regional culture of Zhejiang Province, characterized by a duality of "traditional ethics and modern competition," profoundly shapes family parenting practices. On one hand, the traditional concept of "excellence in learning leads to officialdom" fosters high-control parenting strategies. Chao (1994) noted that Zhejiang families' "commercial DNA" leads to highly utilitarian parenting goals, where parents reinforce academic control through economic incentives (e.g., linking allowance to exam scores), resulting in an "achievement-happiness paradox" in SWB (Huang et al., 2024). On the other hand, rapid urbanization disrupts traditional family structures, intensifying intergenerational value conflicts. Huang's (2023) case study showed that in entrepreneurial families, an increasing number of children reject inheriting family businesses in favour of freelance careers. Such "intergenerational career betrayal" often triggers authoritarian parenting backlash, further reducing children's subjective well-being.

Gender differences play a critical moderating role in the relationship between parenting styles and subjective well-being. Research indicates implicit gender-based resource allocation in Zhejiang families: parenting investments for sons emphasize academic capital accumulation (e.g., expensive tutoring), while daughters are steered toward "emotional dependency cultivation" (e.g., encouragement of stable marriages) (Li et al., 2022). This differentiation leads to distinct stress-coping strategies: males under authoritarian parenting tend to externalize stress (e.g., sports or risky behaviours), whereas females internalize anxiety due to insufficient emotional support, manifesting as perfectionism

or social avoidance (Treviño et al., 2021). Çiçek's (2021) cross-cultural comparison further revealed that East Asian women exhibit higher sensitivity to emotional neglect than Western peers, linked to the historical continuity of the "virtuous wife and loving mother" role expectation.

Notably, the role differentiation between mothers and fathers in parenting exacerbates gender effects. Yaffe's (2023) systematic review showed that mothers tend to adopt emotionally responsive parenting, while fathers emphasize disciplinary control. In Zhejiang families where "paternal absence" is common, unmet emotional needs in male children may drive compensatory behaviours such as excessive competitiveness to fill the void of belongingness (Usán Supervía et al., 2023).

#### IV. METHOD

##### *Selection of research tools*

- i. Subjective well-being measure: Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).
  - (a) Applicability: The Chinese version of the SWLS has been validated to have good reliability and validity (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.73-0.78$ ) among the Chinese population, and its brevity (5 entries) is suitable for embedding in case studies as a quantitative supplement.
  - (b) Operationalization: a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) was used, with a total score range of 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction.
- ii. Parenting Style Measure: Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) (Buri, 1991).
  - (a) Applicability: The reliability of Buri's revised Chinese version of the PAQ was validated in a group of college students, with internal consistency coefficients of 0.66-0.87 and 0.65-0.86 for the mother's version (PAQ-M) and the father's version (PAQ-F), respectively.
  - (b) Scale structure: Contains three dimensions: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, with a total of 30 entries on a 5-point scale. Each parenting style is scored on a scale ranging from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating more prominent performance of that parenting style as perceived by the child.

*Research design: mixed methods (case studies + quantitative scales)*

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative case analysis (in-depth interviews) and quantitative scale (SWLS and PAQ) data in order to comprehensively analyse the mechanism of parenting styles on the subjective well-being of college students in Zhejiang Province. The sample of the study was selected from 50 college students in Zhejiang Province, covering different genders (25 males and 25 females) and family backgrounds, and the diversity of cases was ensured through stratified sampling. Data were collected in two steps: first, qualitative

data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, focusing on family interaction patterns, gender role experiences, and self-assessment of subjective well-being. After the interviews, the subjects immediately completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) to ensure the immediacy and consistency of the data.

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, and the three-level coding was used to summarize the themes of "instrumentalized happiness" and the strategies of "dynamic affective negotiation". At the same time, cross-case comparisons were made by gender and parenting type to reveal the underlying pathways of happiness differences. Quantitative analyses were conducted to verify the generalizability of the qualitative findings through descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and independent t-tests based on the scale data. In addition, the study will actively include negative cases to explore their specificity through in-depth interviews in order to refine the explanatory power of the theoretical model. Through the cross-validation of mixed methods, the study takes into account the depth of individual experience and the breadth of group laws, providing multidimensional evidence for the mechanism of parenting in cultural contexts.

This study controlled sample bias through stratified sampling to ensure the representativeness of the findings; it also strictly followed ethical norms, including obtaining informed consent from subjects, anonymizing data, and providing counselling resources for students who experienced mood swings during the interviews, in order to balance scientific rigor with ethical responsibility for the study.

#### V. FINDINGS

This study systematically analysed the effects of parenting styles on the subjective well-being of college students in Zhejiang Province through a mixed-method design, and the following are the main findings:

##### *Quantitative data analysis results*

- i. Overall distribution of subjective well-being (SWLS):
  - (a) The mean total SWLS score of the 50 subjects was 19.6 (SD = 5.2), which was lower than the Chinese college student norm.
  - (b) Gender differences were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ): the mean SWLS score for women (17.8) was lower than that for men (21.4), reflecting the fact that women are more susceptible to emotional neglect.
- ii. Correlation between parenting style (PAQ) and well-being:
  - (a) Authoritative parenting was significantly positively correlated with total SWLS scores ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting the positive effect of "dynamic emotional negotiation".
  - (b) Authoritarian parenting was negatively correlated with total SWLS scores ( $r = -0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and was particularly significant in the male group ( $r = -0.58$ ).

- (c) Permissive parenting was not significantly correlated with SWLS ( $r=-0.12$ ,  $p=0.31$ ), but female permissive scores were more strongly associated with low well-being.

#### *Results of qualitative data analysis*

##### The "instrumentalized happiness" model of authoritarian parenting:

Male respondents generally reported that "parents only ask about grades and don't talk about feelings," and their PAQ authoritarian scores were all above 40, with total SWLS scores below 20.

##### The "dynamic emotional negotiation" strategy of authoritative parenting:

In the successful cases, parents balanced academic stress with emotional support through milestone adjustments (e.g., "monthly negotiated study plan"). The mean SWLS score for this group was 25.3, significantly higher than the other groups.

##### Emotional neglect and gender differentiation in permissive parenting:

Female respondents described "parents give money but don't care about emotions" and had high PAQ permissive scores and low total SWLS scores, while male students from permissive families mitigated loneliness more through peer support and had higher mean SWLS scores than their female counterparts.

#### *Negative Case*

A male student with an authoritarian parenting, however, did not have a low SWLS score, and interviews revealed that he released stress through athletic competition, suggesting that external support can buffer the negative effects of upbringing.

## **VI. DISCUSSION**

This study reveals the complex influence of parenting styles on the subjective well-being (SWB) of college students in Zhejiang Province through a mixed-methods approach, which not only verifies the universality of classical parenting theories, but also highlights the unique moderating role of regional culture and gender roles. Based on the interactive validation of quantitative and qualitative data, the following discussion focuses on feasible strategies to enhance SWB of college students in Zhejiang Province from the perspectives of theoretical deepening and practical paths.

#### *Theoretical Insights: Dynamic Adaptation Mechanisms of Parenting Styles in Cultural Contexts*

The findings support the positive effect of authoritative parenting on SWB, but the strength of the effect is lower than that of Western studies (Wu et al., 2021), a difference that points to a deeper moderating effect of the cultural context. Families in Zhejiang Province are characterized by "limited negotiation" in authoritative parenting practices: parents are

highly responsive in setting academic goals (e.g., discussing study plans on a regular basis), but retain traditional authority in non-academic domains, such as choosing hobbies and marriage planning. This "selective negotiation" reflects the infiltration of a utilitarian culture into parenting goals - parents instrumentalize emotional support as a catalyst for academic achievement rather than an independent value. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), an individual's autonomy, competence, and sense of belonging need to be balanced and fulfilled in all areas of life, and the "academic-centredness" of families in Zhejiang Province has led to a narrowing of the scope of authoritative parenting practices, with affective negotiation serving only short-term utilitarian goals (e.g., exams and rankings), and making it difficult to develop long-term psychological resilience. Therefore, the localized practice of authoritative parenting needs to break through the single-area negotiation mechanism and establish a dynamic adjustment framework that covers the whole life area. For example, parents can gradually expand the scope of their children's decision-making at different stages of their growth through the strategy of "stage-based empowerment", from academic planning to career choices, interpersonal relationships, etc., so as to systematically increase the level of satisfaction of psychological needs.

The finding of gender differences further challenges the assumption of "gender neutrality" in parenting style research. Women's sensitivity to emotional neglect has been found to stem not only from biological traits, but also from socially constructed gendered emotional responsibilities (Çiçek, 2021). According to gender role theory, women are expected to take responsibility for the emotional maintenance of the family, and when parents fail to provide adequate emotional modelling, the discrepancy between their role expectations and reality can exacerbate self-denial. In addition, men's emotional repression in the context of authoritarian parenting needs to be understood in the context of a cultural framework of 'rigid masculinity'. The family culture of Zhejiang Province reinforces men's internalization of the pressure to achieve, resulting in a greater tendency to divert anxiety through externalizing behaviours rather than actively seeking emotional support. This suggests that future theoretical models need to integrate gender theory and cultural psychology to view parenting styles rather than isolated behavioural strategies.

#### *Practical Path: Building a "Family-School-Society" Collaborative Intervention System*

##### At the family level: transition from "goal-driven" to "needs-based" parenting

- i. Promoting localized practices of authoritative corrections

Family education in Zhejiang Province has long been driven by utilitarian goals, and parents' high investment in academics often comes at the expense of emotional support. In order to realize the localization of authoritative parenting, it is necessary to design a phased and operable parenting strategy that takes into account local cultural characteristics. First, a standardized "four-step stress buffer" intervention

process can be developed for peak periods of academic stress (e.g., critical points such as college entrance exams and graduate school):

**Emotional empathy:** Through role-play training, parents can recognize their children's non-verbal stress signals (e.g., averted glances, body tensing) and respond precisely using the "Emotional Labelling Method". For example, when a child complains about school work, parents should avoid generalized "cheer up" encouragement and instead use specific descriptions, such as, "I see that you've been studying until the early hours of the morning, and your eyes are swollen, so this kind of fatigue must be very hard to bear." This type of response can be effective in reducing the child's defences and building initial trust in the emotional connection.

**Reconstruction of meaning:** Through family meetings, parents are guided to explore with their children the multiple definitions of "achievement". For example, by watching examples of different career paths in the documentary "Seven Years of Life", we can discuss the balance between "stable career" and "self-fulfilment", and help children understand that academic achievement is only part of the value of life. This process needs to avoid lecturing, and instead lead to reflection by asking: "Putting aside societal evaluations, how would you like to see yourself in 10 years' time describing your life now?"

**Negotiating goals:** Introducing the SMART principle (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to break down macro-academic goals into small stage-by-stage tasks. For example, for the examination review, parents can work with their children to develop a mini-target of "breaking through two knowledge points per week", and allow dynamic adjustment according to the actual progress. The consultation process needs to clarify the boundaries between the "parents' right to suggest" and the "children's right to make decisions", for example, it is agreed that "parents can provide alternatives, but the final choice will be made by the children themselves".

**Provision of support:** Matching support resources to the type of needs of the child is differentiated. For "instrumental needs" (e.g., data organization, time management), parents can provide specific help; for "emotional needs" (e.g., anxiety relief), it is necessary to bring in external resources, such as providing guidance on positive thinking training in conjunction with the school's psychological counselling centre. In addition, a "Family Support Resource Bank" can be set up to include information from local educational institutions and mental health hotlines to ensure the accessibility and immediacy of support.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the program, it is recommended that the "Authoritative Parenting Certification Program" be conducted in conjunction with community education centres. Through an 8-week practical course (including theoretical lectures, situational simulations and homework), parents are required to complete an "Emotional Response Record Sheet" and a "Goal Negotiation Log", with feedback provided by a professional supervisor. Families who complete the program are awarded the title of "Model Family for Emotional Support" and priority for public services, forming a positive incentive cycle.

## ii. Breaking down gendered upbringing stereotypes

The traditional concept of gender roles in Zhejiang Province still has a profound impact on family upbringing practices, manifesting itself in an overemphasis on "rigid achievements" for men and an implicit discipline of "emotional services" for women. In order to break this cycle, it is necessary to begin with both cognitive reconstruction and behavioural modelling:

**Cognitive re-construction:** Introducing the "Gender Lens" analytical tool in community workshops to help parents identify gender biases in their daily interactions. For example, by analysing audio recordings of family conversations, flagging "gendered language" (e.g., "men can't cry" to sons or "girls are too hard to study science" to daughters) and discussing the potential harms. Drawing on the Swedish Gender Equality Education Toolkit, interactive games (e.g., "Matching Career Cards") can be designed to allow parents to experience how gender stereotypes can limit their children's career imagination. In addition, non-traditional career practitioners (e.g. male nurses, female engineers) can be invited to share their experiences of growing up, so as to dissolve the stereotypical association of "gender-competence" through real-life stories.

**Behavioural modelling:** Focus on promoting fathers' involvement in emotional upbringing to break the traditional pattern of "absentee fatherhood". For example, in the "Reconstruction of Fatherhood" program, "emotionally challenging tasks" are designed for fathers and sons to participate in together.

Such activities reconstruct fathers' role perceptions through practice, while providing their children with templates for multiple gender roles. For mothers, it is necessary to guide them to break out of the "emotional service provider" self-definition, for example, through the "Career Planning Workshop for Mothers", which helps them to regain their personal development goals and to reduce the vicarious behaviour of projecting unfulfilled aspirations onto their daughters.

## iii. Establishment of a third space for intergenerational communication

The development of digital technology has provided new possibilities for breaking through traditional family communication barriers, but it is necessary to avoid the reduction of technological tools to superficial interactive carriers. The ideal "third space" should realize the dual goals of "technological empowerment" and "emotional deepening":

**Platform design:** Develop the "Zheli Family Voice" APP, integrating the following core functions:

**Dual-channel emotional diary recording:** parents and children record daily emotional events separately, and the system generates "emotional maps" through semantic analysis to visualize the overlap and differences between their emotional needs. For example, when the system detects that children frequently use words such as "loneliness" and "stress", while "satisfied" and "busy" in parents' records account for too high a proportion, it automatically triggers an "emotional gap warning".

**AI Communication Coach:** Based on natural language processing technology, it analyses "high-conflict risk statements" (e.g., the absolutist expression "you must .....") in the chat logs in real time, and provides rewriting Suggestions. For example, "Why did you fail in the exam again" is transformed into "What difficulties did you encounter in this exam? Let's find a solution together". At the same time, the built-in "Conflict Cooling Module" automatically inserts buffer questions (e.g., "Let's take three deep breaths before we continue the discussion, okay?") when it detects a heated argument.

**Virtual Family Conference Room:** Supports role-swapping experiences in VR environments, where parents can "take on the role" of their teenage children, experiencing their stressors in simulated scenarios (e.g., examination halls, social gatherings), and vice versa. The immersive experience enhances intergenerational empathy and reduces the cognitive bias.

**Offline support mechanisms:** to avoid digital tools exacerbating the paradox of "online intimacy and offline alienation", there is a need to synchronize "digital-reality" connectivity activities:

**Family Digital Fasting Day:** One day a month will be set aside to disable the app and switch to traditional ways of communication (e.g. letters, face-to-face games), and community volunteers will provide a "Communication Quality Assessment Form" to help families reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of different communication modes.

**Intergenerational co-creation projects:** organizing families to participate in tasks that require intergenerational collaboration, which naturally stimulate in-depth conversations in the course of creative activities.

Through the multidimensional strategies mentioned above, the parenting transformation at the family level will be upgraded from single behavioural adjustment to systematic cultural change, laying a sustainable foundation of family support for the enhancement of the subjective well-being of college students in Zhejiang Province.

#### School level: implementation of gender-sensitive well-being enhancement projects

##### **i. Renewal of the curriculum system**

As an important place for students' socialization, schools need to respond to the impact of gender differences on subjective well-being (SWB) through curriculum reform. First of all, an "emotional literacy class" can be added within the framework of general education, and a gender-specific and stage-specific teaching module can be constructed. For example, an "Emotion Decoding Workshop" can be organized for male students, focusing on solving the problem of suppression of emotion expression by traditional gender roles. The design of the course can incorporate situational simulation and role-playing, such as simulating workplace conflict scenarios, and requiring male students to practice using "I-message" expressions (e.g., "I'm feeling a lot of pressure because the deadline for the task has been pushed forward"), rather than avoiding or using offensive language to cope with stress. At the same time, the four elements of Nonviolent Communication (Observation,

Feeling, Need, and Request) are introduced, and case studies are used to help students turn theory into practical skills.

For female students, it is necessary to design a "stress desensitization training" module, combining positive thinking meditation and cognitive restructuring techniques to break the shackles of perfectionism. For example, the "cognitive triangle" tool (situation-thinking-emotion) is introduced into the classroom, and by analysing the typical stressful events of female students in academics or social life (e.g., "I failed to reach the expected ranking in the exam"), we guide them to identify the automated negative thinking (e.g., "I am never good enough"), and through cognitive reconstruction techniques to break the shackles of perfectionism. In addition, emotional education can be integrated into interdisciplinary programs, drawing on the Finnish model of "phenomenal teaching". For example, in literature courses, we analyse the family stress coping strategies of Joe and Amy in *Little Women*, and explore the impact of different parenting styles on role development in the light of psychological theories; in social science courses, we introduce gender statistics (such as the Global Report on Women's Leadership), and organize debates on "how gender roles affect occupational well-being", so as to stimulate critical thinking and cultural reflection.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum, it is recommended that a dynamic assessment mechanism be established. For example, the "Emotional Competence Growth Profile" can be used to track the progress of core indicators such as emotional management and empathy through the three-way data of students' self-assessment, peer assessment and teachers' observation every semester, and feedback the results to the optimization of the curriculum. At the same time, we can work with the psychology departments of colleges to develop "Emotional Literacy Competency Standards", and clarify the milestones for different grades (e.g., focusing on self-knowledge in freshman year, and focusing on occupational stress management in senior year), so as to ensure the scientific nature and consistency of the curriculum system.

##### **ii. Upgrading of the psychological counselling system**

Existing psychological counselling services in colleges mostly focus on crisis intervention, but lack systematic attention to the association between family parenting styles and subjective well-being. In this regard, it is necessary to construct a "parenting style-subjective well-being" association database and integrate multidimensional data to realize accurate intervention. First, a dynamic baseline profile of students' parenting styles (PAQ scale), subjective well-being levels (SWLS scale) and demographic variables (gender, family structure, etc.) was collected through the Psychological Assessment for School Entry. Subsequently, machine learning algorithms were used to identify at-risk group characteristics, such as the tendency to externalize emotions under academic stress in boys with authoritarian parenting, or social avoidance patterns in girls with permissive parenting.

Based on database analysis, graded warning and targeted intervention can be initiated:

Students with authoritarian parenting: Automatically matched with "autonomy-building" group counselling.

Curriculum design can include "decision tree simulation" training, e.g. providing virtual scenarios (e.g., career choice conflicts) in which students are asked to weigh parental expectations against personal interests and explore compromise strategies through group discussion. At the same time, narrative therapy was introduced, and students were encouraged to keep a "family conversation reconstruction journal," in which they rewrote their memories of controlling parental language (e.g., "You have to listen to me.") into supportive expressions (e.g., "I understand your choices, but I suggest you consider the following factors") to reconstruct internal cognitive patterns.

For students with permissive parenting: Priority is given to accessing the "Emotional Tree Hole" anonymous complaint platform, which provides immediate emotional support. The platform can set up an AI emotional companion robot, which recognizes the core needs of the complainant (e.g., lack of sense of belonging) through natural language processing technology and recommends matching offline activities (e.g., recruiting information for interest clubs). At the same time, a "Virtual Family Replacement Program" will be developed to recruit trained senior students to act as "shadow parents" to make up for the emotional neglect of their families of origin through regular online communication.

Gender-differentiated interventions: To address the problem of men's emotional suppression, a "Male Emotional Expression Support Group" was set up, and male counsellors were invited to demonstrate vulnerability expression (e.g., sharing their own experiences of occupational confusion), so as to break the stereotypical impression that men must be strong; In response to women's perfectionist tendencies, the program designed the "Imperfection Experiment", for example, asking female students to publicly share a failure experience and collect positive feedback from their peers, so as to reduce the excessive pursuit of "zero defects".

In addition, gender sensitivity training for counsellors needs to be strengthened. For example, a "Cultural Gender Lens" workshop was introduced to help counsellors identify potential gender biases in the counselling process and to refine intervention strategies through case supervision.

### iii. Optimization of home-school cooperation mechanisms

Collaboration between home and school is the key to solving the dilemma of "school-based intervention and family environment". It is recommended that a system of "two-way feedback on growth records" be implemented to build an educational community through data sharing and behavioural guidance. Specific implementation paths include:

**Data Collection and Transformation:** Utilizing campus devices and teacher observation logs to dynamically track students' emotional performance. For example, analysing classroom engagement data (frequency of speaking, active group work) to identify socially anxious students, or speculating on potential psychological needs based on the type of books borrowed (e.g., frequent borrowing of self-help books on psychology). Counsellors need to translate this data into "behavioural portraits" that parents can understand, e.g., "Your child's classroom interactions have

decreased by 60% in the last two weeks, and he or she may be experiencing social stress or family communication difficulties."

**Refinement of feedback:** Avoid generalized suggestions (e.g., "improve communication") and instead provide scenario-based action guidelines. For example, for an avoidant student, suggest to the parent: "At this week's family event, please avoid asking directly about academic performance and instead use an open-ended question: 'Did anything happen this week that made you particularly happy or surprised?' And maintain eye contact with nodding in response as you listen." Also included is a Family Interaction Toolkit, which includes emotion cards (for nonverbal expression practice), parent-child conversation templates, and other resources.

**Closed-loop tracking and adjustment:** A "feedback-practice-assessment" cycle has been established. Parents are required to submit monthly "Family Practice Reports" to record the implementation of interventions and changes in their children's behaviour. The school quantifies the effectiveness of the intervention through regular subjective well-being retests (once per semester) and uses data analysis tools to identify the most effective strategies for home-school collaboration. For example, if data show that Family Walks are effective in improving subjective well-being for students with authoritarian parenting, they can be included in the standardized recommendations.

To enhance parental participation, incentives can be designed. For example, families that consistently participate in two-way feedback can be awarded the title of "Model Family for Cooperative Education" and provided with preferential rights and benefits, such as preferential course selection and exclusive activities on campus open days. Meanwhile, for rural or low-education parents, develop an "illustrated guidebook" that replaces text with visual flowcharts, and conduct offline workshops through township community centres to lower the barrier to understanding and implementation.

Through these systemic reforms, schools will be transformed from a single place of knowledge transfer into "incubators of emotional competence", providing personalized support to students from different family backgrounds within a gender-sensitive framework, and ultimately achieving an overall improvement in subjective well-being.

### Social level: Reconstruction of cultural values and institutional safeguards

#### i. Reshaping regional cultural narratives

Zhejiang Province's deep business tradition and educational culture have long shaped "economic success" as the only measure of life's value. In order to break this single narrative, we need to reconstruct social cognition through systematic cultural projects. First of all, the media, education departments and local cultural institutions can be launched jointly with the "Zhejiang new family training" campaign, with multiple media to spread the "success of pluralism". For example, a series of microfilms called "The Possibility of Home" focuses on the choices made by different families: a Wenzhou businessman's family supports their daughter to

give up the family business and devote herself to non-heritage wood carving; a Hangzhou programmer's couple encourages their son to enrol in archaeology major and participate in Liangzhu Cultural Heritage Protection Project together. This kind of narrative dissolves the stereotypical association of "business = success" through real stories, while highlighting the possibility of intergenerational value integration. In addition, we can draw on the experience of Japan's "local creation" policy to embed the revitalization of regional culture into family education reform. For example, in Cixi, Ningbo, a "celadon culture inheritance base" was set up to organize workshops for families to participate in the production of celadon, in which parents and their children work together to complete the entire process from earth picking to firing. In this process, the "slow and careful" nature of traditional craftsmanship naturally leads families to reflect on the limitations of utilitarian education, while non-verbal interactions (such as physical contact when kneading clay together) serve as a catalyst for re-establishing emotional ties.

In order to expand the influence of cultural narratives, it is necessary to build an "online-offline" linkage communication network. On the online side, the Zheli Family Training Digital Museum has been developed, utilizing VR technology to restore the family education scenes of famous historical figures in Zhejiang, and interactive question-and-answer modules have been set up. At the offline end, we rely on community academies to organize "new family training forums", inviting intergenerational family representatives, educationalists and entrepreneurs to have dialogues on the same stage.

## ii. Improvement of the policy support system

Legislative level: building a rule of law framework for emotional parenting

Currently, relevant laws focus on the macro-guarantees of guardianship and educational resources, but lack detailed regulations on the quality of emotional upbringing. It is recommended that special provisions on "emotional parenting" be added to the local implementation rules, specifying the core indicators of family emotional support (such as the average daily length of effective communication and the appropriateness of emotional responses) and requiring communities to rely on professional organizations to carry out annual assessments. For example, Hangzhou can pilot a "Family Emotional Health Index" assessment system, which combines social workers' observation in the home with wearable devices to monitor heart rate synchronization in parent-child interactions, voice emotion analysis, and other technological means to form a multi-dimensional assessment report. For families with permissive parenting, a "three-tier intervention mechanism" is activated: first-tier for the family education guidance order, forcing parents to participate in the "Emotional Response Workshop"; the second level is a "family emotional mentor" stationed at the home, with a licensed psychological counsellor providing six-month in-home guidance; and the third level involves the intervention of a child rights protection agency to ensure that minors' right to psychological development is not infringed upon. At the same time, it is necessary to establish a credit system for parental education, and to incorporate

participation in emotional upbringing training into the public's credit score system, linking it to the acquisition of public service resources, so as to form a rigid constraint.

## iii. Economic dimension: innovative incentive policy instruments

Traditional family education policies rely on a "punishment-discipline" logic, whereas positive incentives are more likely to stimulate internal family dynamics. It is recommended that "scholarships for quality home education" be established and that graded tax breaks be provided to authoritative families. For example, families certified by a third-party assessment organization can enjoy a 5%-15% personal income tax reduction based on the level of the "Emotional Support Index". The assessment criteria should include quantitative indicators (e.g., frequency of weekly family meetings, percentage of consultation in conflict resolution) and qualitative indicators (e.g., increase in children's subjective well-being), and the data should be tamper-proof through blockchain technology to ensure fairness. At the same time, enterprises are encouraged to participate in the "Family-Friendly Employer" certification program, and enterprises that implement "Parental Leave" (e.g., allowing parents to take one paid family day per month) or "Parental Training" are given social security awards. This will promote the transformation of enterprises from "labour consumers" to "co-builders of family well-being," and resolve the dilemma of the dichotomy between workplace culture and family education.

At the same time, we can learn from the intergenerational career consulting service of Singapore's Family Service Centre and develop a tool called "career gene mapping". By analysing the career trajectories, core skills and values of three generations of the family, it can help young people identify innovative opportunities in traditional industries, and realize the value resonance between personal aspirations and family resources. In addition, in Hangzhou, a digital economy highland, we can explore the "Yuan Universe Intergenerational Workshop", which utilizes digital technology to restore the development history of family businesses, so that children can experience their fathers' entrepreneurial hardships in virtual scenarios, thus enhancing intergenerational understanding and emotional resonance.

Through the above multi-dimensional policy innovation, the social level will form a synergistic governance network of "cultural reconstruction - institutional guarantee - service support", which will provide sustainable systematic support for the transformation of family education, and ultimately promote the leapfrog development of Zhejiang Province from "economic highland" to "sample of happiness".

## *Research limitations and future directions*

There are three limitations in this study: first, the cross-sectional design is difficult to reveal the causal chain between parenting styles and subjective well-being; second, the samples are all from public institutions in Zhejiang Province, which fails to adequately reflect the special characteristics of students in private institutions, who may be faced with a more pronounced class solidification and a

lack of parental resources; and lastly, the study fails to explore in depth the moderating effects of variables such as parents' education level, which may influence the pathway of subjective well-being through differences in "parenting capital".

Future research can be deepened through two dimensions: On one hand, longitudinal study designs could track the full-cycle psychological changes of college students from enrolment to graduation, revealing the dynamic effects of different family parenting styles during critical phases such as freshman adaptation, academic stress periods, and employment anxiety. Particular attention should be paid to the cumulative consequences of negative parenting behaviours like emotional neglect. On the other hand, cross-regional cultural comparative studies should be conducted to systematically analyse the differential impact mechanisms between coastal commercial cultures and inland traditional ethics on parenting goals, while simultaneously examining the structural differences in emotional support strategies between urban and rural families. Such research could not only verify the cultural adaptability of parenting theories but also provide empirical evidence for formulating regionally differentiated family education policies.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The generally low subjective well-being (SWB) among college students in Zhejiang Province reflects a multifaceted crisis shaped by the interplay of traditional family ethics, market-driven utilitarianism, and educational involution. This study reveals that parenting styles serve not merely as familial behavioural patterns but as conduits for transmitting regional cultural norms and gender role expectations. Key findings include:

Authoritative parenting significantly enhances SWB through "dynamic affective negotiation," yet its efficacy is constrained by the utilitarian narrowing of emotional support to academic goal-setting, neglecting autonomy in non-academic domains.

Authoritarian parenting exacerbates male anxiety due to societal pressures for "rigid masculinity," triggering externalized stress responses.

Permissive parenting disproportionately reduces female SWB, reflecting implicit societal discipline that binds women to "emotional servant" roles, thereby internalizing anxiety.

To address this crisis, a coordinated "family-school-society" intervention framework is imperative:

Family Level: Implement culturally adapted authoritative practices (e.g., "staged autonomy empowerment"), balancing academic guidance with expanded decision-making in non-academic spheres (e.g., career choices).

School Level: Adopt gender-sensitive strategies, such as "emotional decoding workshops" for males to counter repression and "stress desensitization training" for females to mitigate perfectionism. Utilize a "parenting-SWB database" for targeted interventions (e.g., autonomy training for authoritarian-family students).

Society Level: Reshape values via policy innovation (e.g., mandating "emotional parenting" assessments) and

cultural narrative shifts (e.g., the "Zhejiang New Family Training" campaign promoting pluralistic success beyond economic metrics).

This multi-system collaboration repositions SWB from an "achievement accessory" to a core indicator of youth development. Future research should track longitudinal effects and conduct cross-regional comparisons to validate cultural adaptability.

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