

## MASTER'S THESIS

### Parenting Adult Children in the Digital Era: A Case Study of Elderly Parents in Urban China

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## ABSTRACT

Parenting refers to the practices carried out by parents over their lives within their social-cultural context to ensure their children's welfare. The literature has largely focused on investigating younger parents' diverse parenting styles while overlooking those of elderly parents. With the wide diffusion of digital communication technologies in daily life, digital parenting is becoming increasingly popular. However, despite the growing literature on digital communication between elderly parents and adult children, few studies have considered the diversity of elderly parents' digital parenting styles. Informed by life course theory, this study investigates elderly parents' diverse parenting styles and uses of digital communication for parenting based on qualitative data from 28 elderly parents in mainland China. The findings reveal three parenting styles used by elderly parents: active, uninvolved, and laid-back parenting. These three styles have both differences and commonalities. The differences are related to their digital communication frequencies and the content of their digital and face-to-face communication with their children, and are influenced by their agency, their children's present life situations, their previous parenting experience, and their gender role identity. The commonalities are changing role contents, keeping a distance from children's lives, and assisting children in child raising, and are shaped by their adjustments to their children's life transitions and accompanying parenting norms. Moreover, the elderly parents in each style use digital communication technologies differently in their parenting.