

Confucian Work and Homeschooling: A Case Study of Homeschooling in Shanghai

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Abstract

This study conducted a case study of homeschooling in order to provide in-depth information regarding the demographic characteristics of homeschooling parents, the motivations and the process of practicing it and its outcomes in Shanghai. The public and the policy-makers, and education officials have had little substantive information in relation to homeschooling, in particular the homeschooling which emphasizes the Confucian education. This study has revealed that the main characteristics of homeschools in Shanghai can be summarized as: the majority of the parents are dissatisfied with school education; the parents come from a complex educational background. Most of the parents prefer the traditional culture norms and values, such as Confucian work; and all the homeschooling families come from the middle class, who are relatively wealthy.

Keywords

choice, multicultural education, urban education

Introduction

Since the initiation of market-oriented reforms in 1978, Chinese society has been experiencing a period of transition from a planned, centrally controlled

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economy to a market economy. The radical changes in the area of economics have resulted in dramatic changes in social stratification; for example, there is the emergence of a new social group, *Zhongchan jiecheng* (middle class), in China (Li, 2000, pp. 82-104). In this context, literature focusing on social and educational changes has argued that social transformation is an impetus for, and is reflected in educational changes. The search for efficiency and better education has led to a noticeable change in parents' educational choices. Parents' choices regarding their children's education seem to be varied and differentiated. Consequently homeschooling, as an educational phenomenon, has emerged in the big cities in China, such as Beijing and Shanghai.

Homeschooling occupies a marginal place within the educational system in China. In the early 2000s, a small group of parents, who were Christians living in Beijing, started to practice home education for their children. The church and church friends established and organized a homeschooling training program in order to provide the homeschooling families with the necessary knowledge and approaches. According to the estimates of the organizers of the homeschooling training program, the maximum number of homeschooling parents in Beijing, who have a religious background, is less than 40. According to a media report (2006), there is also a small group of homeschooling families in Shanghai.

The findings of my empirical research study of the homeschoolers in Beijing, which were presented elsewhere, have revealed several primary characteristics of homeschooling families in Beijing. First, it has been found that the homeschooling parents are dissatisfied with contemporary school education in China and the mothers' act as the teachers or educators in the process of homeschooling. Second, it has been noted that all the homeschooling families come from the middle class, who are relatively wealthy and highly educated. Third, the majority of the parents are Christian, with strong religious beliefs. There is evidence that religion has an important influence on their everyday teachings at home.

Focus of This Study

As a marginal educational phenomenon, academic researchers have failed to examine the development of home education in the context of Chinese educational research. The policy makers and education officials have little substantive information in relation to homeschooling. This article reports the findings of a data-based research study of homeschooling families in the city of Shanghai in order to provide in-depth information regarding the demographic characteristics of homeschooling parents, the motivations for homeschooling in Shanghai, the process of practicing it, and its outcomes. This

article draws specific attention to the description of the case studies of home-schooling in Shanghai. It begins with a brief description of the development of “Meng Mu Tang” in Shanghai since 2006, followed by a brief introduction of its outcomes.

Data Resources

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), before carrying out a research project, it is essential to decide which research approaches will be appropriate. This research study adopted secondary research and qualitative methods in order to fulfill the purpose of the research. Secondary research was chosen in order to acquire a broad overview of literature in relation to the studies concerning homeschooling, as well as those relating to Bourdieu’s theoretical framework which provided this research with a strong foundation for both empirical fieldwork and theoretical analysis. As Hyman (1987, p. 24) claims, in research on more contemporary issues the investigator searches through a wide range of materials covering different areas and eras, which may result in greater scope and depth than is possible when the focus is only on primary data. For this research study, I read a number of books, journal papers, and materials relating to homeschooling in the contexts of Western countries: all of these have provided an insight into the relevant research issues. Moreover, this study has benefited from access to the outcomes of research studies carried out in the West, which have provided a better overview and understanding of parental involvement in homeschooling. In particular, secondary research has been adopted to collect media reports and documents concerning the case studies of homeschooling in the city of Shanghai. The data sources relating to the cases of homeschooling in Shanghai are primarily derived from a media report (2006) on the websites that focus upon “Meng Mu Tang.”

A Brief Introduction to “Meng Mu Tang”

On July 10 2006, the media revealed the existence of a homeschool, called “Meng Mu Tang” in Shanghai. “Meng Mu Tang” was named after the mother of a Chinese ancient academic, *Meng Zhi*. Twelve children were following a “Confucian reading” course in this mainly full-time home education. The oldest was 12 years old, and the youngest, 4 years old. It was set up in September 2005 by 12 parents who were dissatisfied with the contemporary examination-oriented educational system that is constrained by so many principles. The teaching content focused only on Confucian works. In fact, this class may be seen as a kind of private academy (*Shi Shu*), like those which existed in ancient China. It was run on a low-key basis since homeschooling

is not legal in China. This report attracted nationwide discussion as to whether homeschooling should be made legal.

In July 2006, the local educational authority in Shanghai stated that the running of “Meng Mu Tang” was considered to be an illegal operation since it had violated the relevant compulsory education laws. The legal evidence can be summarized as follows: first, such a school breaks the relevant laws regarding the permission to run schools. The owners of “Meng Mu Tang” should have applied for permission to run a school from the local educational authority in Shanghai. Without an official permit from the government, running a school can be seen as an illegal act. Second, it breaks “Compulsory Education Law” in China with respect to Item 2, Item 4, and Item 35. Items 2 and 4 state that parents are responsible for sending their school-aged children to school to receive compulsory education. It is a kind of national responsibility rather than solely that of the citizen. According to Item 35, “Meng Mu Class” may be regarded as an illegal educational institution. Since the teaching content of “Meng Mu Class” was only concerned with Confucian works, this contravened several principles of the “Compulsory Education Law” of China’ in relation to the school curriculum, teaching content, and curriculum setting.

However, the person legally responsible for “Meng Mu Tang” claimed that it is not an educational institution, it is only a form of modern homeschooling that several parents have voluntarily organized, which should not be regarded as an official educational institution. Consequently, it was not necessary to apply for permission to run it. All the fees and costs in relation to “Meng Mu Tang” have been shared by the parents participating in it. Furthermore as a form of homeschooling, “Meng Mu Tang” should be granted official recognition and legal permission. The works of Confucius are one of the treasures of Chinese traditional culture; reading them should be central to the teaching content of homeschooling. Since in most Western countries, homeschooling is permitted, Shanghai should likewise permit homeschooling by law.

On February 10 2009, “Meng Mu Tang” was closed by the Shanghai Educational Authority again for the same reasons for its closure in 2006. The educational authority stated that if the parents were to send their children to study at “Meng Mu Tang,” it would be seen as an illegal action. In what follows, I use the collected media reports and other published documents as a case study to illustrate how “Meng Mu Tang” operated; this is presented in three parts. First, I provide a brief description of the participants. Second, I offer a focused discussion of the motivation of parents whose children were studying at “Meng Mu Tang.” Finally, I present an in-depth analysis of the teaching style and the academic and social outcomes of the education at “Meng Mu Tang.”

Teachers: Who Is Teaching?

The organizer and the parents insist that their action was a form of home education, rather than an educational institution, as shown by the quote below:

... We are not running an educational institution ... This is a big “family,” although the children came from the different families ... Actually this is a kind of home education ... as the organisers we act as the parents and educate these children ... the children’s parents volunteered to send their children to live and study at Meng Mu Tang ... we are a family, not a school ... (one of the organizers of “Meng Mu Tang”)

The organizer provided a description of the development of “Meng Mu Tang,” which was initially established for her own child and her nieces. In her view, “Meng Mu Tang” represented a form of homeschooling rather than school education.

... The first students of “Meng Mu Tang” are my niece and my daughter ... since my brother was running his business abroad and his child had to be parented and educated by me ... my daughter does not like to study in the kindergarten or nursery school ... she is clever ... she can recite the Confucian works well in her early years ... I felt that I am able to educate them myself at home. And I believe that I can teach my son better than the school does ... the results are good. And the news regarding my home schooling quickly spread in the circle of my relatives ... Finally many relatives and friends stopped their children’s study at school and sent them to my place ... so it is not a school. It is a kind of home education ... (one of the organizers of “Meng Mu Tang”)

It is clear from the quote above that in the initial period the organizer of “Meng Mu Tang” provided schooling for her niece as well as her own daughter. She feels that her daughter was clever and talented. However, her daughter could not adapt to the education provided by conventional schools. In this context, she believes that she can provide a better education for her daughter at home than the school does.

... We have a lot of relatives who are running businesses in Shanghai ... most of them see the good results of my practising education at home and send their children to live and study here ... I always explained to them that this is not a school, it is a kind of education at home ... what I am doing is called home education, but not running a school ... However, they do not care about whether it is a school or not ... most parents complained about how bad the mainstream school is ... or since their children’s academic results are not good, their children have been poorly treated ... (one of the organizers of “Meng Mu Tang”)

Since the outcomes of her homeschooling were good, more and more children of her relatives joined it. Eventually the homeschool was named “Meng Mu Tang” and most of the participants are now citizens of foreign countries. As the organizer comments, “Two thirds of the participants here have the identity of a foreign country . . . These children have acquired an overseas identity because of their parents.” It should be noted that in the initial period, “Meng Mu Tang” was composed of the children of the parents and those of their relatives or friends. In the initial stages of “Meng Mu Tang,” it was a mother that taught her daughter and her nieces, but as it developed, several teachers were employed to teach the children Confucian.

The Motivations

All of the parents mentioned their children’s problems with conventional schools. The children who participated in “Meng Mu Tang” struggled with the classroom-based teaching at conventional schools, which is very examination-oriented. Their parents generally complained about the standardization of teaching which focuses only on whether students achieve the scores above-average grades, rather than educating children on the basis of their individual interests and learning needs. Below is an example of a middle-class mother, who provided an insight into the reason that she decided to withdraw her son from a conventional school and send him to study at “Meng Mu Tang”:

. . . my son is 13 years old now . . . he was studying at a top secondary school in Shanghai . . . He is not happy at school . . . In his elementary study his academic results were very good . . . However, after he entered this secondary school, there was too much competition from his classmates who are good at their subject studies . . . at the end of last term, when my son had achieved great progress and I wanted to praise him . . . He suddenly screamed and shouted that he hated the scores and the competition . . . I realised that my son cannot continue to stay at such a school . . . I decided to find a place in which my son can feel happy while studying . . . Finally I sent my son to study at “Meng Mu Tang” . . . (a middle-class mother, an administrator)

Since the school placed too much emphasis on the students’ academic scores, the competition to achieve better academic grades resulted in her son’s reluctance to continue his regular education at the mainstream school. For this reason, the mother was forced to send her son to study at “Meng Mu Tang,” where she could depend on the teacher paying greater attention to her son’s individual interests in terms of study and his personal needs. There is evidence that home education provided by “Meng Mu Tang” was especially

beneficial for those children who did not fit into the mainstream school system. In addition, the vast majority of the parents were concerned about the transmission to their children of their preferred values and culture, namely, those embodied in Confucian theory and works. This is consistent with the findings of Romm (1993) and Ray (2000), who have observed that in the context of the United States, a great number of families were practicing home education in order to transfer specific values and cultural norms to their children. As one middle-class parent stated:

. . . I like the Confucian works very much myself . . . The education in relation to the values of the traditional culture has been removed in the present school education, which I believe is the most important piece of education for children . . . however, I am too busy with my business to teach my children myself . . . I send them to live and study at "Meng Mu Tang" where they can join in the group of people with similar philosophies and things like that . . . yes, I have to transfer the responsibilities of parenting and educating to the "Meng Mu Tang" . . . (a middle-class mother, official)

Education in the values embodied in Confucian theory and works has been ignored within the current education system. Accordingly, the homeschooling parents in Shanghai were determined to send their children to study at "Meng Mu Tang" in order to transfer specific values, culture, and norms to their children. In brief, for reasons similar to those of homeschoolers in the city of Beijing, all the parents, whose children were studying at "Meng Mu Tang," felt deeply uncomfortable about the contemporary examination-oriented education provided by conventional schools. This finding supports the argument of Lawrence (2007, p. 2), who asserts that most of the homeschooling parents reported that the most important reason for educating their children at home was to provide religious or moral instruction.

Teaching Process

The quote below provides an insight into the teaching process in "Meng Mu Tang."

. . . In the early morning at around 6:20 am the teachers bow and show their respect to Kong Zhi three times . . . then all the children watch and follow their teachers in bowing to *Kong Zhi* three times . . . from 8:00 am to 11:00 am, it is the time of reciting the Confucian works . . . there is a CD reader on the desk of every child . . . at the beginning the teachers start to read and then students follow . . . then all the students follow the CD and read and recite the works themselves . . . each work should be repeatedly more than 20 times . . . the primary content includes "Meng Zhi" and "The Analects of Confucius" etc . . . there are also several famous English

literary works, such as “the Shakespearian Sonnets” and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” . . . from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm is the time for comprehensive courses, including drawing, music, yoga, science and handcraft class etc . . . the break time at noon is about one and an half hours . . . the learning activities in the afternoon are similar to the ones in the morning . . . in the evening there is self-learning time in which children can choose freely what they would like to be engaged in . . . reading, diary writing, drawing and so on . . . at 8:00 pm all the children go to sleep together . . . (a middle-class mother, an administrator)

As shown by the quote above, the teaching content at “Meng Mu Tang” is Chinese Confucian studies and works. It should also be noted that the teaching method at “Meng Mu Tang” focuses on children’s reading and recitation under the direction and guidance of the teachers. In the learning activities, the children are central, while the teacher takes the role of an assistant. This teaching style appears to be flexible and child-centered.

. . . The primary responsibility of “teacher” is to organise, cooperate and encourage students to be engaged in their studies . . . the positive assessment and timely encouragement is the key point . . . according to students’ character, background and ability, the teacher sets up appropriate study goals for a child . . . the children can follow the teaching’s reading or can listen to the CD and recite (the Confucian works) on the basis of their own progress . . . (one of the organizers of “Meng Mu Tang”)

The quote above indicates that the teaching goals of “Meng Mu Tang” pay specific attention to students’ individual study needs. There is evidence that the flexible homeschooling approaches allow the teachers at “Meng Mu Tang” to teach subjects in accordance with the children’s development and study interests. In particular, since one teacher is responsible for educating only two or three children, the teachers are able to concentrate on a student’s learning needs. In this context, the individualized instruction is able to inspire children’s motivation to study, which in turn results in their improved academic outcomes.

. . . Since his academic results are not very good, his school teachers do not like him . . . My son even has no friends at school . . . Although he is only a student at Grade Two, every day after school he has been doing his homework till ten, eleven o’clock at night . . . so many works he has to complete every day . . . but his scores are still not good . . . Finally following the introduction of my friends, I send him to study at “Meng Mu Tang” . . . He felt much better here . . . it seems that he started to take an interest in his study now . . . he told me that the teacher always teaches him according to his situation . . . the teacher always uses the different approaches to help him grasp the teaching content . . . he feels no pressure . . . (a middle-class mother, an owner of a company)

The accounts of this mother illustrate this child's inability to adapt to the education in mainstream schools where examination results seem to be only criterion for evaluating the outcomes of a child's learning activities. Most of the parents reported that the primary reason why they chose "Meng Mu Tang" is because of their strong dissatisfaction with contemporary school education, which only emphasizes the children's academic attainment (Ray, 2000; Romm, 1993; Wartes, 1988, 1991). In China, in the setting of the classroom, there are generally about 50 to 60 students who need the attention of a single teacher. It is impossible for a teacher to have immediate access to a student. However, the teaching approach at "Meng Mu Tang" is able to accommodate the children's personal learning styles. It was noted that the education at "Meng Mu Tang" seems to have reinvigorated this child's interest in studying and to respond to his specific study needs, which has resulted in his achievement of improved academic scores.

The Outcomes

The majority of the parents reported the positive outcomes of education at "Meng Mu Tang" in terms of both academic results and the development of their children's character. Several parents particularly noted the positive development of their children's character. They mentioned that the courses on the works of Confucius provide a positive influence in terms of shaping their children's good behavior and manners, as shown by the example below:

... My son is 5 years old ... he is always moving around ... my husband and I send him to study here ... Every day he is reading and reciting the Confucian theory and works ... These reading and learning activities really do some good for the development of his character ... Now he can sit and learn something quietly for around half an hour at home ... Also he is polite to the elderly and his peers ... we are very satisfied with the changes in his character ... (a middle-class mother, an owner of a company)

Her son is too active to be well-suited to a classroom setting. The main reason why this mother has sent her son to study at "Meng Mu Tang" is to restructure his learning so that he can do it at a pace that helps him to be successful, rather than being under stress in the setting of the school classroom. This middle-class mother highlighted the positive influences of "Meng Mu Tang" on the development of her son's character. In her view, her son has achieved significant progress in terms of both academic results and the development of his character.

... My son cannot sit down and concentrate on something for a long while ... In the classroom he is too active to listen to teacher's lecture very well ... I have tried

to communicate with his school teacher. And I asked her whether she can set a lower study goal for my son and develop his study interest on the basis of his own particular character . . . My son is clever but he needs much more time when learning something new . . . however, his teacher refused me and told me directly that her tasks as a teacher are to educate students and train them to achieve excellent academic results . . . She is too busy to have energy or time to pay specific attention to my son's particular needs . . . I felt that my son has been abandoned by the school in which academic results are the only criterion to evaluate a student . . . I never trust the school and teachers again . . . I finally send my son to study at "Meng Mu Tang" in which my son can be educated individually . . . (a middle-class father, owner of a company)

The transcripts above show why, for this middle-class parent, conventional schooling is less satisfactory, since it cannot fulfill his son's personal study needs. This father has experienced great frustration with regard to his son's poor academic performance at school. He has therefore suggested that the teacher should have flexible approaches which will accommodate his son's different learning needs in order to achieve academic progress. However, in a large classroom setting in China, a teacher may be incapable of providing the individual attention which is essential to facilitate each child's achievement of excellent academic results. Under the examination-oriented educational system, teachers seem to focus on how to train their students to achieve better academic results, which occupies most of their time and energy and limits their ability to treat students as individuals. In contrast, at "Meng Mu Tang" a teacher is in charge of only two or three students, which makes it possible to teach students individually. This individual-teaching approach clearly contributes significantly to children's improved academic attainment. In the context of the United States, Rudner (1999) has observed that the academic achievement of home-educated students was exceptionally high when compared with that of traditionally schooled students. There is much additional evidence of the high academic achievement of the homeschooled. This result is evident in the findings of several other studies (Shyers, 1992; Smedley, 1992; Taylor, 1986). The positive outcomes in terms of the academic improvement of the home-educated child are clearly described in the quote below:

. . . I found certain changes happened with my son with much greater satisfaction . . . He feels less stressed when he is engaged in his learning activities and he is able to finish the proposed work on time . . . when he cannot recite the works very well, the teacher will change the teaching style and ask him to do some reading instead . . . he looks much happier with his learning process . . . now he starts to be interested in his daily study again . . . (a middle-class mother)

The example above indicates that the teaching style at "Meng Mu Tang" permits the teacher to customize the teaching content according to the children's learning pace and personal study needs. In this context, there are many more opportunities for this child to receive individual attention from his teacher. In addition to the improved academic results, the positive outcomes in terms of the development of children's character are shown by the example below:

... Three months ago I sent my son to live and study at "Meng Mu Tang" ... Now I am happy to find that my son has obtained good manners ... he is very polite to the elderly and his peers ... whenever he gets into the car, he usually lets the elderly or parents first ... I asked him why he did so ... he answered me, "The elderly are first, the younger are second" ... (a middle-class father)

Other parents of children at "Meng Mu Tang" feel very frustrated with the conventional school education. The parents seem to be very critical of the public schools because such schools cannot serve children's individual interests and their learning needs. Under the current educational system, schools merely focus on how to improve children's academic results, while other concerns, such as the development of children's values and norms, take a second place. It is clear that the education at "Meng Mu Tang" seems to provide the children with more opportunities for character development. Most of the parents reported the positive influence of "Meng Mu Tang" on their children's social development. This result supports the findings in the relevant literature in the Western context, which reveal that the social development of homeschooled children is also usually better than that of their counterparts who are educated in the classrooms of conventional schools (Ray, 2000; Rothermel, 1999; Smith & Sikkink, 1999).

Although several parents have reported the positive outcomes of "Meng Mu Tang," the contemporary public debate has focused on how the children who attend "Meng Mu Tang" will be able to continue their secondary education at regular schools or how they can take part in the entrance examinations for the university in China.

... For most of the children at "Meng Mu Tang," they have already obtained an overseas identity. For the rest of them, their parents are determined to send them to continue their secondary education or higher education abroad ... They do not consider whether they can continue to study at school in China ... most of the parents told me that what they want is to teach their children how to be a good person and acquire training in relation to shaping appropriate study habits ... in my view, reciting the Confucian works is the best way to train the children how to acquire a good manner ... (one of the organisers of "Meng Mu Tang")

Unexpectedly most of the parents whose children study at “Meng Mu Tang” would like their children to continue their secondary school or college education abroad. From this perspective, they anticipate that their children will receive an education which will help the development of their character rather than achieving superior academic results. Consequently the teaching content at “Meng Mu Tang” is not linked to the regular classroom-based regulation at secondary school or the content of the entrance examination for universities, which is illustrated by the quote below:

... I am an engineer in a company in Shanghai ... I would like my son to study at “Meng Mu Tang” till his secondary school courses ... I have registered and maintained his student position at a junior middle school in my home town ... when he is at an age to take part in the entrance examinations, I will send him back to continue his regular education at my home town ... (a middle-class father, engineer at a company)

As shown in the quote above, apart from those whose children possess a foreign identity, parents generally maintain their children’s registration at a mainstream school while studying at “Meng Mu Tang.”

Why Does “Meng Mu Tang” Exist in Shanghai?

In this research, I took specific interest in the question relating to the educational phenomenon of “Meng Mu Tang,” namely, why it has emerged in Shanghai. The city of Shanghai is seen as a large international city, in which new theories and ideas arising from Western contexts, as well as foreign languages are very popular. It is surprising that in such an international setting Confucian theory and its related education have become very popular among certain middle-class parents who are practicing homeschooling. When considering the reasons for the emergence of “Meng Mu Tang,” which focuses on education based on the works of Confucius, it is essential to note that all educational phenomena are generated from the particular sociocultural contexts of China. In general, I suggest that the emergence of “Meng Mu Tang” in Shanghai is due to parents’ multiple educational choices for their children. As noted in the previous chapters, the transition in Chinese society from a planned, centrally controlled economy to a market-directed one has been accompanied by radical changes in the social structure and social stratification. For example, middle class has emerged in China since the mid-1990s, and this has given rise to socially polarizing effects in terms of parental choice concerning their children’s education. A significant majority of middle classes in China feel dissatisfied with the current standardized approach

provided by conventional schooling. Middle-class parents who possess privileged cultural, social, and economic capital consider it to be their responsibility to provide their children with as much support with regard to education as possible in order to ensure that their children maintain or improve upon their current social status. These tensions have resulted in the fierce competition for places at elite institutions. Most middle-class parents are keen to take advantage of their cultural, social, and economic resources to ensure their children's entry into a top school or an elite university.

However, some middle-class parents would like their children to be educated individually according to their individual learning needs, but the conventional school education cannot adequately respond to such needs. These middle-class parents are consequently determined to take other options. They withdraw their children from conventional schools and educate them at home themselves. When looking back at the development of homeschooling in China, it is important to note that the rapid economic development over the past three decades has brought about the emergence of homeschooling in China. Without the strong support of economic and cultural capital, Christian homeschooling parents in Beijing and those parents of "Meng Mu Tang" in Shanghai would have found it impossible to make such a decision and practice home education for their children. In these contexts, the emergence and development of homeschooling may be seen as an outcome generated by the rapid economic development and radical social changes that have taken place since 1978, rather than a particular educational phenomenon.

In addition, what becomes evident is the extent to which the emerging middle class in China is a highly differentiated one. And, in particular, levels of cultural, social and economic capital have become an important dividing line within the middle class in China. According to Bourdieu (1977), the middle class possess certain tastes and perceptions of their own social position; for example, they may have a good higher educational background, a good income, and a certain lifestyle, which may distinguish them from other social groups in terms of education, occupation, and residence. In contemporary Chinese transitional society, the different social classes are conducting a hegemonic battle of classificatory struggle in order to distinguish themselves from each other through education, occupation, purchasing of goods, and residence. In the competition to provide a better education for their children, the different volumes of cultural, social, and economic capital that parents possess has resulted in their differing ability to mobilize their children's cultural and economic capital, which in turn is embodied in the different social status of parents located within different fractions of the middle class in China. It is noticeable from the parents' comments that some middle-class parents who choose to send their children to study at "Meng Mu Tang"

prioritize their preferences of class distinction from the other social factions. As a middle-class parent asserts, “. . . the education of “Meng Mu Tang” is different from the education at school . . . It belongs to someone who is really understanding education and Chinese traditional culture . . . However, the school teachers do not know this . . .”

When considering the qualitative data regarding Christian homeschooling in Beijing and documentary data concerning “Meng Mu Tang” in Shanghai, several startling differences, as well as obvious similarities, start to emerge. Consequently, it is essential to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis between “Meng Mu Tang” in Shanghai and Christian homeschooling in Beijing in several respects, as illustrated by Table 1. The significant differences relate to teachers, teaching content, teaching patterns, organizational patterns, parents’ background, parents’ beliefs, educational ideas, and educational purpose (see Table 1).

Unlike the homeschooling mothers in Beijing, the parents whose children participate in “Meng Mu Tang” are generally much less likely to be involved in the home education themselves. The majority of these parents, who are highly educated, are interested in the theory and works of Confucius. They send their children to learn from a homeschool mother in order to educate their children in the Confucian works and the specific values they prefer.

It is clear that a profound difference between these two kinds of home education is the fact that the parents of Christian homeschooling in Beijing show a preference for the religious aspect of practicing homeschooling, while the parents of “Meng Mu Tang” prefer to transfer their values to their children via education which focuses on Confucian theory. However, the qualitative data for this research illustrate that there is a clear similarity between Christian home education and the education at “Meng Mu Tang,” namely, the fact that all the parents feel deeply dissatisfied with conventional school education under the direction of examination-oriented policies. It seems that most of the children have struggled in conventional schools. The parents and children feel that they did not fit into the current conventional school education. In this context, in line with Apple’s (2006) argument, participation in “Meng Mu Tang” may be seen as consistent with the stand taken by many parents against the existing public education system.

Policy Implications

One of the purposes of this study is to provide policy-makers with substantive information about the development of homeschooling in China. At the level of policy-making, this article attempts to refer to the experiences which have proved successful in the development of homeschooling in the context

Table 1. The Differences of Homeschooling in Beijing and Shanghai (*Meng Mu Tang*).

	Meng Mu Class	Individual homeschooling
<i>"Teacher"</i> <i>Teaching content</i>	Homeschool mothers/teachers Confucian theory and its works —Confucius Analects —Shan Zhi-jing	Mothers themselves The Christian homeschooling test books and related reading materials —Sunlight homeschooling text books —Preston homeschooling text books —Bible study was conducted on every Thursday afternoon of each week Mothers are involved into everyday teaching
<i>Teaching patterns</i>	Employing some professional teachers in the area of Confucian theory	
<i>Organizational patterns</i>	Purchasing a villa as the setting of study, and 12 students lived and studied together	Core-up study activities organized by the church once a week
<i>Parents' background</i>	Affluent and middle class; with higher education degree; with a very good economic and social background	Affluent and middle class; with a very good economic and social background; with higher education degree; mothers who are housewives or professionals who have free time
<i>Parents' belief</i> <i>Educational idea</i>	Confucian theory and its works Emphasis on the learning of Chinese traditional culture;	Christian Focus on their children's mental growth, rather than academic results; emphasis on the learning of Christian
<i>Educational purpose</i>	Outside the control of the current examination system	Out of control of the current examination system

of the United States and the United Kingdom. The following policy recommendations are made in relation to the development of homeschooling in China.

First, it is recommended that the policy-makers and the local educational authority should take specific notice of the critiques provided by the homeschooling families. The vast majority of parents who choose to homeschool do so because of their dissatisfaction with the current educational policies; for example, policy makers always ignore the moral concerns and focus only on standardized academic results.

Second, the relevant advisory and supporting services, such as those providing the homeschooling training program for the homeschooling educators, should be supplied by the local authorities. It is suggested that these services and training courses should provide guidance or direction and should establish a platform for further communication between education experts and homeschooling parents with respect to knowledge, information, and teaching approaches. It is recommended that the local educational authorities should establish relevant regulations in order to achieve a balance between protecting the well-being of home-educated children and the rights of parents to direct their children's education.

Finally, public school resources should be open to home-educated children. In particular, home-educated children should be strongly encouraged to make use of the well-established library resources of the public schools and local community. At the same time, homeschooled children could be encouraged to participate in art exhibitions, performances, English speech competitions, and science competitions.

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Author Biography

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