



Cultural order and parents' motivations for practising home education in China

Xiaoming Sheng

To cite this article: Xiaoming Sheng (2020) Cultural order and parents' motivations for practising home education in China, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 28:1, 1-16, DOI: [10.1080/14681366.2019.1574878](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2019.1574878)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2019.1574878>



Published online: 31 Jan 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 157



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Cultural order and parents' motivations for practising home education in China

Xiaoming Sheng

Faculty of Education, The University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

ABSTRACT

There is little literature which provides any analysis regarding the relationship between cultural order and home education. Research reported here found that home education has grown steadily in recent decades and that parents' motivation for home education was closely associated with cultural order. It was noticeable that Christian and Confucian values seemed to provide philosophical support for Chinese middle-class families who have chosen to educate their children at home. The parents reported that they preferred to cultivate in their children their favourite culture and beliefs, rather than to merely facilitate their achievement of excellent academic outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Cultural order; motivations;
home education; China

Introduction

Historically in China, from the Tang Dynasty (7th and 8th centuries), a cultural order has emerged in Chinese society as the result of the powerful influence of Confucian culture and values. In feudal China, in the context of Confucian education, those who excelled in learning could become high-status officials. From the Tang Dynasty, young men studied hard and pursued superior academic results in order to manage their social mobility successfully. In this context, a kind of official culture existed. Those people who were well versed in Confucian studies and achieved superior academic results in the official selection examinations could be awarded the opportunity to serve as civil servants in the imperial bureaucracy. Following the political changes in the 1950s, the influence of the traditional cultural order has gradually disappeared. Since 2000, a number of middle-class parents in the big cities of China have withdrawn their children from the conventional schools and provided them with Confucian and Christian home education in order to restore the older cultural order.

However, as a marginal educational phenomenon in China, the study of home education has been ignored. In particular, there is no literature that specifically examines the correlation between Chinese cultural order and parents' motivations for practicing home education. The topic of home education and culture in China is an important one and needs to be explored through empirical research. This study therefore explores whether there exists a correlation between parents' motivation for home education and

cultural order. The research utilized a rich body of qualitative data to provide in-depth information about how Confucian and Christian culture influenced parents' decision to home educate. Moreover, drawing on the qualitative data, this study paid specific attention to how Confucian values and Christian beliefs provide philosophical support for Chinese families who have chosen to teach their children at home. The discussion on the influence of the cultural order is a distinctive topic that is rarely found in Chinese literature on home education. It is anticipated that this study will facilitate further discussion and will provide a research-based analysis regarding home education and cultural orders for both English-speaking and Chinese readers. In what follows I firstly provide a brief description of my research methodology, this is followed by the research contexts of culture and home education in the Western context. Then, drawing on the empirical data collected in this study, I present an in-depth analysis of cultural order and Confucian home education. Finally, I specifically address the way in which parents' Christian cultural concerns influenced the process of their practice of Christian home education.

Research methodology

The data gathered for this study were drawn from participants involved in my empirical research on cultural order and home education. Snowballing techniques (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981) were adopted to select the qualitative sample. The selection of the sample parents began with my recruitment of a small number of respondents. At the end of each interview the participant was encouraged to recommend suitable additional respondents. The sampling process was repeated until there was no additional new information available from the sample parents (Cooper and Emory 1995). In all, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 62 parents involved in Confucian home education and Christian home education in the city of Beijing: 30 parents involved in Christian home education and 32 parents engaged in Confucian home education. In addition to the traditional class classification criterion, namely occupational stratification, individual educational levels were taken into consideration. On the basis of both occupation and educational credentials the sample of home-educating parents in this study can be considered as middle-class. The interview covered a diversity of topics relating to the parents' educational background, parents' religious and Confucian beliefs, their motivation for home education, parents' cultural preferences and their effects on home education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by myself. The interviews lasted from 1 to 1.5 hours on average and interviews were conducted face-to-face in children's own homes or their parents' place of work. A few of the interviews were conducted over the telephone at the parents' request. The interviews with parents were recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis purposes. During the whole process of this qualitative research, I was aware of the importance of guaranteeing the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Home education is illegal in China because it contravenes the provisions of China's Compulsory Education Law. Given the underground nature of the activities in which the Christian and Confucian home educators are engaged, I preserved the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents while collecting the qualitative data.

Literature review

Socio-historical context of Christian education in China

In recent Chinese history, Christianity has made a significant contribution to the development of modern Chinese education (Gu 2004; Zhao 2008). As one of the results of the implementation of 'The Eastward Dissemination of Western Learning' in the late Qing dynasty (late 19th/early 20th centuries), a growing number of secondary schools and universities were established by missionaries and churches (Wang 2008; Hong 2006). The teacher at the church school was the pastor and missionaries who established such schools in China were primarily from the USA and UK. In the late Qing Dynasty there were dozens of famous universities established by the church, including Yenching University, St John's University, Hunan Xiangya Medical University and so on (Hong 2006). In the middle of the 1950s, the church universities disappeared and these universities became part of the system of higher education in China. Since 2000, a number of Christian parents have practiced Christian home education for their children in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Socio-historical background of Confucian education in China

The phenomenon of Confucian home education is not new in the history of China. *Shi shu*, an old-style home education with a private tutor, initially emerged in the periods of the spring and autumn, more than 2,000 years ago. This educational system was gradually abandoned at the end of Qing Dynasty. As the result of the establishment and expansion of the institutionalized school system, the system of *shi shu* was gradually reformed and replaced by the government in the 1950s. Although *shi shu* was abandoned as an educational style, it still exists today in the form of private classes and private tutors in China. Since the end of the 1990s, a number of home educators practising Confucian home education for their children have also emerged in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Relevant research in the USA

A number of studies which have emerged from the USA have provided in-depth information regarding culture and home education (Stevens 2001; Collom 2005; Liao 2006; Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007; White, Moore, and Squires 2009; Spiegler 2010; Kapitulik 2011). Stevens (2001) and Lines (2000) observed that the culture in public schools has had a negative influence on the values and beliefs that parents prefer to cultivate in their children. Liao (2006) claims that conservative Christians are likely to have negative attitudes towards instructional authority and expertise. Moreover, a growing number of scholars have observed the strong influences of Christian culture and values on home education (Smedley 1992; Lockerbie 1994; Mayberry et al. 1995; Carper 2000; Bauman 2001; Emerson and Hartman 2006; Romanowski 2006; Edwards 2007; Basham, Merrifield, and Hepburn 2007; Fields-Smith and Williams 2009; Lips and Feinberg 2009; Kapitulik 2011). Edwards (2007) found that a number of parents considered religion to be the primary motivation for home education. These parents felt that their priority was to transmit religious beliefs and values to their children (Fields-Smith and Williams 2009; Kapitulik 2011). Mayberry et al. (1995) recognise the

important role of religion in parents' decision-making: they refer to the majority of religious home educators' orthodoxy as a belief in the existence of an external authority, an authority that guides their moral decisions, including the decision to educate their children at home (cited in Stevens 2001, 11).

Relevant research in the UK, Europe, Canada and Australia

A number of studies conducted in the UK, Europe, Canada and Australia have addressed the development of home education (Arai 2000; Van Pelt 2003; Barratt-Peacock 2003; Blok and Karsten 2011; Neuman and Guterman 2016, 2018; Jackson 2009; Roache 2009; Blok and Karsten 2011). In the UK, a strong body of literature has focussed on the rise of home education in the UK and the reasons behind this educational phenomenon. (Rothermel 2003, 2010, 2011; Hopwood et al. 2007; Thomas and Pattison 2008; Badman 2009; Parsons and Lewis 2010; Webb 2011; Nelson 2013; Smith and Nelson 2015; Bhopal and Myers 2016; Myers and Bhopal 2018). Parsons and Lewis (2010) investigated twenty-seven home-educating parents through an online survey in the UK. The majority of parents in this study identified 'push' factors away from the school as their main reasons for educating their children at home. These included bad experiences with formal provision and the perceived failure of schools to meet their child's needs adequately. Smith and Nelson (2015) conducted a survey and examined the prevalence and characteristics of home-educating families in the UK. They estimated that around 1% of families with dependent children have home educated either on a full or part-time basis. Myers and Bhopal (2018) examined the motivations of British Muslim home educators. They observed that Muslim families are both marginalised by the perception of 'risk' associated with radicalisation and also by their consequent decisions to home educate.

Cultural order and Confucian home education

My interview data showed that, after China entered the new century, a growing body of parents with strong Confucian beliefs were enthusiastic about transferring Confucian culture and values, such as filial piety, family, honour, respect, etc., to their children. The transcripts provided by Zhang Meimei illustrated the Confucian emphasis on the importance that education has played in the parents' decision-making process.

...when I was only 5 years old, my father started to teach me to read the Confucian enlightenment books for children...through these books my father taught us that if a child is not educated well, it is the fault of his father and mother...he always told me that a child should eat three meals to help the body to grow; reading and learning is for acquiring knowledge... learning and reading is more important than eating...my father asked me to look with my eyes, read with my mouth, write with my hands, recite in my brain when I read each book...The test was that I was asked to write down the content of the book that I had completed reading from memory...every day whenever I completed the reading of one book, I would be tested on that book... My experiences of reading and learning Confucian books have resulted in my preference for reading for the whole of my life...each book enlightened me and inspired me to learn much more...however, all these good things cannot be obtained from the current schooling...I would like to educate my son myself as my father taught me...After long

consideration, I withdrew my son from the school and taught him Confucian works myself at home...(Zhang Meimei, a middle-class mother)

Zhang Meimei's account illustrates how her Confucian culture and values strongly influenced her motivation to educate her son at home. As shown by the above example, Confucius stresses the important role of fathers and mothers in a child's education. According to Confucian culture, Zhang Meimei's father established a specific family rule which emphasized the importance of education for the moral and academic development of a child. It was as a result of her family's particular rule that she developed a love of reading and learning, which eventually resulted in her academic success.

...my father believed in the values and norms of Confucian works...my father taught us that Confucius says, 'To feed without teaching is the father's fault'...he therefore is very strict with our learning...learning is the most important thing in my family principles and parental instruction...My father always said that learning is above doing any other thing, and learning is the most important foundation for an individual to survive in the society...following the guidance of Confucius, my parents regarded education as the most important thing in my family...even if there is no money to buy new clothes and good food for us, some money should be spent on buying a variety of books for us...From my childhood, every day my father taught me and my two brothers using the Confucian reading materials for children...My father required us to read deeply and he insisted that only if I read carefully and deeply, I would be able to learn real knowledge...This inspired me to love reading books and love learning...the reason that I am determined to educate my daughter at home is that as her mother, if I did not provide her with a proper education, it is my fault...I would like to provide the best education for her...Confucian education is the best... (Gao Ying, a middle-class mother)

Gao Ying's account shows how Confucian culture and values dominate home-educators' decision-making processes. As the above quote reveals, philosophically, Confucian culture advocates that parents have an irreplaceable vital educational role in relation to their children. According to Confucian culture, Gao Ying's father believed that learning was more important than anything else. Gao Ying's decision to home educate was motivated by her Confucian preferences and therefore she was eager to teach specific Confucian philosophies and culture to her child. This example provides strong evidence to support the claim that Confucian culture and values constituted the philosophical foundation for Chinese parents in choosing to teach their children at home.

...I believe in the strong influences of Confucian works on one's moral development...As Confucius claims, without *li* and filial piety a person cannot survive in contemporary Chinese society...filial piety is the key virtue in Chinese culture...My own family rule clearly required that the offspring must have filial piety and respect for the parents and ancestors...in my view, filial piety has been embodied in almost of all religious beliefs and cultural values in China...most of my friends regard sending their children to study at a key-point school as the right way...I do not think so...I prefer to transfer the best of Chinese culture and moral values, such as *li*, *ren*, *xiao*, in particular filial piety to my son...The first book I chose for him was the Confucian classic *xiao jing* or Classic of Filial Piety...as my father required, the child must learn how to behave with filial piety, and then start to learn other things...only if a child has acquired the principles of filial piety, is he capable of leading a successful life...in the family it refers to respecting the parents and showing the respect to the ancestors...in society, filial piety means showing love and respect, and supporting others...This is the foundation for a person to survive in the world...(Wang Ziwen, a middle-class mother)

Wang Ziwen's accounts illustrate how home education offered her (and other home educators) many more opportunities to facilitate the development of their children's character by focusing on their moral character. Her primary motivation to home-educate was her desire to transfer her notion of filial piety to her son. Her belief in Confucius's philosophy motivated her to practice Confucian home education with her son. Wang Ziwen believed that the teaching aims and content in conventional schools, which ignore cultural and Confucian values, would be harmful in terms of her son's well-being. Accordingly, she was enthusiastic about cultivating her son's cultural values. It is noticeable that Wang Ziwen wished to transfer her preferred moral values such as filial piety, to her son and this became the primary motivation for her to practice home education. This is also evident in the findings of the studies in the USA context. Princiotta and Bielick (2006, 14) found in their study that 72 percent of the sample parents claimed that provision of moral instruction was relevant when deciding whether to practice home education. Romm (1993) states that a growing number of home-educating families were practicing home education in order to cultivate specific cultural norms and ethical values in their children. In a similar way, the example below provides further details about this:

...most of my friends and relatives chose to cultivate Western culture, values and religion in their children...They are eager to lead a Western life style...nowadays more and more people have become individualistic and less connected to the family...this is not right...family is the most important thing in classical Confucianism...Confucian works illustrate what the family is and what a family ought to be...in the view of Confucius, filial piety is regarded as the first virtue in Chinese culture...filial piety was not merely loyalty to an individual's parents. Filial piety was seen as the norms of *li*, *ren*, and *yi*...According to Chinese culture, without filial piety, *ren* and *yi*, an individual is less able to lead a successful life in Chinese society...Confucius's thought teach as Chinese people what are family values, proper family relationships and family ties...These good values have completely disappeared from the teaching content at school...The school only focuses on academic results...this is not correct...I chose to educate my son in Confucian studies at home because I would like to transfer these great values and norms to him...in my view, an individual's success should depend on which cultural values and norms he has acquired...
(Lu Yin, a middle-class mother)

As Lu Ying states, her decision to teach her son at home according to Confucian education principles was attributable to her belief in Confucius's philosophy, which emphasizes family values, family bond, filial piety, and family relationships. In the eyes of Lu Yin, Confucius's philosophy illustrates what a family is and what it ought to be. Family values, family bonds, filial piety, and familial relationships were considered as the basis of Confucius's philosophical system. It is through the performance of filial piety, *li* (politeness), *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness) that a family establishes harmonious and orderly family relationships. The norms, such as filial piety, *ren*, *yi*, were regarded as the most important virtues in Chinese culture, which should be cultivated in offspring. In the view of Lu Yin, to some extent, schools have lost sight of moral concerns, in particular Confucian culture, values and norms, and merely focus on the results of standard examinations. Similarly, in the USA context, Ray (2000) claims that religiously motivated parents are enthusiastic about teaching specific philosophies and religious values and developing close family ties.

...the moral development of my son is first concern...I do not think that a person who has made a large amount of money is a successful person...I have already earned a lot of money...I would like my son to become a successful person possessing strong cultural values and moral norms...As for me, Confucian works are the best works for facilitating the achievement of good moral development in young people...throughout the works of Confucius, there is a focus on the development of one's personality and moral norms...I want my son to learn *li, shi, yi, xiao jing* etc...these works cannot be taught by conventional schools...They do not care about how to develop a child's personality, but merely pursue academic results...after being involved in Confucian home education for one year, my son has achieved an unexpectedly dramatic development in terms of moral values and norms... (Jiang Li, a middle-class father)

Similarly, Jiang Li focused on transferring specific cultural or philosophical values and norms with respect to the family. According to him, his primary motivation for educating his son at home was to provide moral instruction, with the aim of transmitting his preferred Confucian moral values and norms. As he stated, to some extent, the education provided by conventional schools may lose sight of moral concerns, and may just focus on the results of standard examinations. Jiang Li's accounts illustrate how home education provided him with more opportunities to cultivate Confucian culture and values in his son. Many middle-class parents, like Jiang Li, seem to view home education as a free environment, permitting them to provide a positive learning situation in which their children can be encouraged to acquire good cultural values and moral norms. In brief, the quotes presented above illustrate how Confucian values, such as filial piety, family honour, respect etc., might have provided philosophical support for the sample parents who had chosen to offer their children Confucian education at home. Like Jiang Li, many Confucian home educators believe that home education may provide a positive learning atmosphere in which children can be encouraged to acquire good Confucian values and cultural norms. This is consistent with the findings of scholars in the USA. Several scholars have observed that home educators are involved in home education that aims to transmit their specific ethical values to their offspring (Princiotta and Bielick 2006; Lawrence 2007; Kunzman 2009).

...Confucian education only belongs to those people who really understand education and Chinese traditional culture...currently, most of the parents and the school teachers do not know what is valuable in education...Confucian values and works were transmitted across generation over thousands of years...someone who acquires the real Confucian values can be seen as a person who occupies a high status in terms of culture...it refers to the cultural level but not how much money you earn...I always think about what Confucius brought about to the education in China...nearly all the world-famous social scientists and writers in modern history of China received good education in Confucian education...In my view, the standard which assesses whether a person is a member of a higher social fraction should depend on how many cultural values he or she acquired, but should have no connection with volumes of money... (Zhao Lei, a middle-class mother)

From the early 2000s onwards, Chinese society has witnessed a hegemonic battle among different social groups engaged in terms of stratification in order to distinguish themselves from each other. In this respect, it is noticeable that, like Zhao Lei, many parents who are providing Confucian education for their child at home have prioritized their cultural preference for distinguishing themselves in terms of cultural order. These middle-class parents are likely to pursue higher status lives in terms of culture or moral

values rather than trying to attain great monetary wealth. Like Zhao Lei, parents who are enthusiastic about transferring cultural or moral values are those from the middle classes who possess a high volume of cultural capital. This is evident in the comments provided by the other sample parents involved in this study.

Cultural order and Christian home education

The interview data collected from the sample parents focussed on which aspects were of specific importance to parents in the decision-making process involved in the choice to practice Christian home education. It was noticeable from the qualitative data in this study that parents showed particular concern about Christian culture in relation to the contemporary Chinese context:

...I felt that the choice of providing Christian home education to my child is very important for the positive development of a child...I do not really care so much about how much knowledge that my daughter can learn...I am only keen on the cultivation of her appropriate religious beliefs and norms...take the example of my friend's child, he was educated in Christian studies at home...now he is very successful in whatever environment in which he finds himself...as he said, the knowledge or skills you learn are not so important...however, something of the particular beliefs and values will be maintained throughout your whole life...when you observe him and his peers, you will acknowledge significant differences between them...The personality, the self-confidence, the persistence, the way he deals with affairs are quite different...the way that he behaves is very different from those graduates from the selective universities...In my view, there exists a certain boundary in terms of culture...a child should be inculcated with proper religious culture and values rather than studying hard to achieve a top position in the entrance examinations...this cannot be obtained from school, and thus I chose to educate my son myself at home... (Julie, a middle-class mother)

Julie's transcripts illustrate the fact that there exist certain differences in terms of culture between students who are educated at a conventional school and Christian home-educated children. She recognised the strong influence of Christian beliefs on a child's moral development. Her motivation to undertake home education was primarily her wish to transfer her particular religious culture and values to her son. It was found that many parents were motivated to home educate because they wanted to transfer their values and beliefs which reflected their cultural, religious, and moral values.

The data indicate that the Christian home educators in the sample were enthusiastic about teaching the Christian doctrine and the Bible to their children. I suggest that the contemporary situation of home-educating development in China seems to be similar with the home education in the USA in the middle of the 1980s. In the early stages of the home-educating movement in the USA the majority of home-educating families were conservative Christians who were eager to teaching the Bible, its values and doctrine to their offspring. (Bauman 2001; Romanowski 2006; Anthony 2009; Jorgenson 2011). Data from the 2003 NHES showed that around 30 percent of home educators claimed that their primary motivation was to provide religious or moral instruction (Francis and Keith 2004; Princiotta and Bielick 2006; Medlin 2006; Lawrence 2007). Kunzman (2009) states that conservative Christians comprise the largest subset of home educators in the USA. Along similar lines, Klicka (2002) observes that many home-educating parents decide to home educate because they want to educate their children

in a positive learning environment in which their preferred religious beliefs may be enhanced. Planty et al. (2009) claim that, in their study, 83 percent of respondents who were involved in home education reported that they provided religious or moral instruction.

In comparison, with the dramatic growth of home education over the past decades, home education has changed from being the exclusive preserve of families with a Christian background (Livni 2006). Participants in home education in the USA are now from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds (McDowell 2000; Farris and Woodruff 2000; Bielick, Chandler, and Broughman 2001). The data from the 2003 NHES (National Home Education Survey) indicate that 30% of home educators in the USA reported that their primary motivation was to provide religious or moral instruction; 31% were concerned about the environment of conventional schools (safety, drugs, negative peer pressure); 16% expressed dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools; 7% said that their child had physical or mental health problems; 7% made the choice because their child had other special needs (Princiotta and Bielick 2006, 14). I suggest that similar factors will affect the Chinese situation as well. It is estimated that a similar change in the demographic diversity of home education will occur in the Chinese context in future decades.

...when my husband and I decided to educate my son in Christian studies by ourselves at home, I understood that my son would be excluded from the competition for places at a key-point elementary school, secondary school, and top universities in China...why did we make such a choice? My husband and I both attained our successful social mobility on the basis of our academic success in the examination-oriented educational system...from my childhood, I studied quite hard day and night in order to gain first place in the various entrance examinations...If my academic results did not rank first within the class, grade and school, I would not go to sleep but would study hard...although I graduated from a top university and have a relatively good job with a high salary in Beijing, I felt nothing but tiredness and pain...it is God who released me from such suffering...in my view, no matter how much money you earn, without beliefs and culture, you are just a machine...what I did came from the spiritual guidance of God...although in current society people are struggling for mobility in terms of economic status, I would like to cultivate in my daughter a high volume of culture...only if a child is educated in appropriate beliefs and values, can he accordingly lead a successful life...
(Kathy, a middle-class mother)

It is noticeable from the above quote that Kathy focussed on cultural order in her decision-making process. Like Kathy, many parents decide to withdraw their children from a conventional school because they believe that the other school options might not properly satisfy their children's cultural, moral, and religious needs. As shown by this example, most parents are motivated to teach specific culture, philosophies and religious values. In a similar vein, several scholars have observed that Christian culture advocates that parents play an educational role in the lives of their children (Carper 2000; Emerson and Hartman 2006; Kunzman 2009; Lois 2013). Carper (2000, 6) suggests that many home educators have abandoned institutional education for home education in an attempt to restore what they believe to be education in its purest form, namely, parents teaching their own children.

...in my eyes, the knowledge a person learns through the examination-oriented educational system is not so useful...although your academic results are excellent in the examinations, what you learn may be no use in your job and future career...acquiring appropriate beliefs and values is the most important for a child...according to my own experiences, a child, if he is educated in Christian beliefs at home, perhaps in the initial period you cannot find any differences in terms of his characteristics, but after several years, you can easily distinguish who possesses a high level of culture and religious beliefs...In the process of practicing Christian home education, I have established a study mission for my son...if a person wants to survive in the world, it is essential to acquire Christian values and beliefs...and then God will lead him to live a successful life...I do not want to see that one day when my son has grown up, he has only become a machine to make more money...The decision to practice Christian home education seems to be the choices, for example, what kind of life you want your child to lead, and what type of person you want your child to be...(Sally, a middle-class mother)

For Sally, acquiring appropriate beliefs and values seemed to be more important than merely achieving excellent academic results. Sally identified the significant influence of Christian beliefs and values on the development of a person's personality and character. Sally's account illustrates a close correlation between the acquisition of a high level of culture and her motivation to practice Christian home education. This confirms the findings concerning home-educated children in the USA (Davenport 2001; Saba and Gattis 2002; Hadderman 2002; Dahlquist 2005; Klein 2006; Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007; Basham, Merrifield, and Hepburn 2007; McKeon 2007). Saba and Gattis (2002) have observed that one of the primary reasons for American parents to home educate is to provide religious or develop character mobility. Klicka (2002, 124) found that, in home education, parents can fulfil the commands in scripture to teach their children God's truth every day. Similarly, Kapitulik (2011, 132) found that religious parents describe their children as special, unique and in need of strong, but loving, adult guidance.

...when I withdrew my son from the school and started to educate him Christian values and beliefs, all of my relatives thought that I might be crazy. In their eyes what I have done was to ruin my son's future...My husband and I have had a serious consideration before we decided to home educate...Now nearly all of the top universities in China were Christian institutions which were established by church before 1949...a number of famous Chinese scientists were educated in church universities...I would like my son to be cultivated in both Christian culture and academic knowledge...As a parents, I believe in the powerful influences of religious beliefs on a child's education...(Sheila, a middle-class mother)

It is noticeable that Sheila's motivation to home educate is primarily framed by her beliefs in the powerful positive influences of Christian culture and beliefs in a child's academic and mental development. As presented by Sheila, Christianity and church institutions have made contributions to the educational development of China. In this Sheila believed that practising Christian home education provided her with a realm in which she could cultivate both Christian culture and beliefs and academic knowledge in her son. This, she felt, was not available in the contemporary examination-oriented education provided by conventional schools.

Discussion and conclusions

It is noticeable from the qualitative data collected in this study that the home-educating parents in China in the sample reported that they regarded the importance of Confucian,

moral and religious instruction as their primary reasons for home education. As shown by the data, Confucian culture supports the view that parents have an irreplaceable and important role in the education of their children. As Gao Ying's father suggested, *if a child is fed but not educated, it is the father's fault*. It is noticeable that Confucian culture has contributed to how a family is involved in a child's education. According to Confucian culture, learning is more important than anything else. It has been noted that Confucian culture and values provide philosophical support for Chinese families who are involved in teaching their children at home.

Unexpectedly, when presenting the 'hows' and 'whys' of practicing Christian and Confucian home education, the middle-class parents in this research stated the close relationship between cultural order and their motivation for home education. In the view of home-educating parents, contemporary Chinese culture provides certain orders which assign people from different social fractions to different positions in the social space. The majority of parents in the sample justified their decisions to home education on moral, philosophical, and religious grounds. They were very concerned about their child's development in terms of morals. As shown by the data, Confucian home educators reported that Confucian philosophy and values carry distinctive moral weight in post-Mao Chinese society. It is noticeable that many Christian home-educating parents are also likely to integrate religion, culture, learning, and family life. In brief, the interviews in this study showed that religion, Confucianism, culture, and morals were all involved in the decision-making processes of the parents who participated in the study. Two-thirds of parents claimed that they purposely taught cultural and moral values in the course of practicing home education. These parents were eager to instil cultural and moral values into their offspring rather than merely achieving excellent academic results. Nearly all the Christian home-educating educators indicated that their choice of home education was motivated by their desire to transfer specific religious beliefs and culture. As parents reported, home education provided them with an opportunity to be directly involved in their children's moral and cultural development and learning. As presented previously, a number of parents in the sample were enthusiastic about restoring older cultural orders by providing their children with Christian and Confucian home education. I am especially interested in exploring, from a sociocultural perspective, the reasons that parents preferred to restore cultural order in the context of contemporary Chinese transitional society.

As presented previously, historically there exists a cultural order in China. This cultural hierarchy had strong influences on the formation of individual attitudes towards culture and knowledge in Chinese history. During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, those who were highly educated were officially regarded as individuals who should be assigned to the rural areas for re-education. In this period, the boundaries created by the old cultural order were broken. Since China entered the post-Maoist period, Chinese society has experienced dramatic economic development. The core criterion for assessing whether an individual is successful in society is now how much money that individual has earned. As I have argued elsewhere (Sheng 2013, 2014), in contemporary Chinese society, the rank of the three forms of capital is economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. However, since the early 2000s, many middle-class people have begun to challenge the dominance of assessment standards. This study has revealed that a number of middle-class people have been enthusiastic to restore the cultural order rather than merely

pursuing the accumulation of a large amount of money. In contemporary Chinese society, for these middle-class people, there exists a certain cultural hierarchy between those who have acquired culture and knowledge and those who have not. This cultural change, which emerged after 2000 in China, has led a growing number of middle-class parents to turn to forms of Christian and Confucian home education.

Drawing on the interview data collected in this study, I have attempted to provide an understanding of the demographic information of these middle-class parents. Some parents who had acquired strong Confucian or Christian beliefs merely pursued transmission of their own culture, values and beliefs to their children, together with a willingness to accept their relatively inferior economic status within the middle classes. Some parents who possessed high volumes of economic resources wished to teach Confucian or Christian culture to their children in order to facilitate their children's attainment of a high status in terms of the cultural order. Some middle-class parents, who were themselves highly educated, were very dissatisfied with the current dominant social ideology which merely focuses on how much money an individual earns. They were unhappy with the education provided by conventional schools, which, in their eyes, was a product of the marketization of education, rather than a pure kind of education. These parents wanted their children to receive a pure form of education which would only transmit the best culture, values and norms.

As the qualitative data of this study has shown, Christian culture had a powerful influence on parents' decisions to adopt home education and the whole process of practicing Christian home education in which, according to Christian culture, educational responsibilities should be fulfilled by parents. The Christian home-educating parents in the sample had withdrawn their children from the public schools and provided them with Christian education at home because they were keen on cultivating specific culture, values, and norms in their children. This is similar to the findings of Stevens (2001), who recognised the important role of religion in parents' decision-making processes. Christian home-educating parents were eager to educate their children in line with their Christian beliefs and culture, using a curriculum with a specifically Christian world view.

Many parents stated clearly that they were disappointed with the culture and values that were cultivated and promoted by conventional schools. In a similar vein, scholars have recognised that contemporary conventional school cultures conflicts with the culture, values and beliefs that parents preferred to cultivate in their children (Stevens 2001; Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007). A number of parents have themselves benefited from Confucian culture, values and norms. From this perspective, these parents were eager to restore the religious cultural order. Although they were located in a market-oriented social space, based on the strong support of their religious beliefs, these Christian families chose to home educate to cultivate in their children good religious and cultural values. To some extent, they regarded home education as a free environment where they could take advantages of many more opportunities to encourage their children to acquire high volumes of religious culture, thereby restoring the cultural order of contemporary Chinese society.

This discussion of home education in China in relation to the cultural order is a distinctive feature of the research report and is not usually seen in China's social and educational issues. This article has provided a cultural perspective on the 'hows' and

'whys' of parents' practicing Christian and Confucian home education. To some extent, this article presented the reason that some parents turned to Confucianism and others to Christianity. Moreover, this article provided a discussion of the demographic information of the middle-class parents who preferred to transfer their Confucian and Christian beliefs to their children. This article could help further the scholarly discussion on the influence of culture on education and also bring a timely analysis of an important contemporary educational issue to the English-speaking audience as well as Chinese readers.

To develop the work begun here, future research could provide consideration of how home education in China fits in with similar global trends, particular in the USA and UK. Could similar trends in other countries affect Chinese situation as well? How these are possibly connected or not? Secondly, in this study, I have attempted to provide an understanding of the demographic information of these middle-class parents. However, since there are only a few quotes from only 60 interviewees, the summary may be seen as tentative and indicative, requiring further research in relation to this topic in order to test its wider applicability.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

- Anthony, K. V. 2009. "Educational Counter Culture: Motivations, Instructional Approaches, Curriculum Choices, and Challenges of Home Educating Families." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State.
- Arai, A. B. 2000. "Reasons for Home Education in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne De L'éducatio* 25 (3): 204–217. doi:10.2307/1585954.
- Badman, G. 2009. "Report to the Secretary of State on the Review of Elective Home Education in England." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/328186/Review_of_Elective_Home_Education_in_England.pdf
- Barratt-Peacock, J. 2003. "Australian Home Education: A Model." *Evaluation and Research in Education* 17 (2&3): 101–111. doi:10.1080/09500790308668295.
- Basham, P., J. Merrifield, and C. R. Hepburn. 2007. *Home Schooling: From the Extreme to the Mainstream*. Vancouver, BC: The Fraser Institute.
- Bauman, K. 2001. "Home Education in the United States: Trends and Characteristics." Accessed 24 July 2007. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0053.html#impact>
- Bhopal, K., and M. Myers. 2016. "Marginal Groups in Marginal Times: Gypsy and Traveller Parents and Home Education in England." *British Educational Research Journal* 42 (1): 5–20. doi:10.1002/berj.3198.
- Bielick, S., K. Chandler, and S. Broughman. 2001. *Home-Educating in the United States: 1999* (NCES2001-033). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Biernacki, P., and D. Waldorf. 1981. "Snowball Sampling: Problem and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling." *Sociological Methods and Research* 10: 141–163. doi:10.1177/004912418101000205.
- Blok, H., and S. Karsten. 2011. "Inspection of Home Education in European Countries." *European Journal of Education* 46 (1): 138–152. doi:10.1111/ejed.2011.46.issue-1.
- Carper, J. C. 2000. "Pluralism to Establishment to Dissent: The Religious and Educational Context of Home Education." *Peabody Journal of Education* 75 (1/2): 8–19. The Home Education Movement in Context, Practice, and Theory.

- Collom, E. 2005. "The Ins and Outs of Home Education: The Determinants of Parental Motivations and Student Achievement." *Education and Urban Society* 37: 307–335. doi:[10.1177/0013124504274190](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124504274190).
- Cooper, D. R., and C. W. Emory. 1995. *Business Research Method*. 5th ed. Chicago: Irwin.
- Dahlquist, K. L. 2005. *The Choice to Home Educate: Home Educator Perspectives and School District Options*. Minneapolis, MN: Department of Educational Policy and Administration, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.
- Davenport, A. M. 2001. "Home-Educating: A Descriptive Study of Educational Practice and Climate in Selected Settings." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Seton Hall University, New York.
- Edwards, L. 2007. *Home Educating Families: An Analysis of Their Characteristics and Perceptions toward Public School* (UMI No. 3259042). ProQuest Digital Dissertations.
- Emerson, M. O., and D. Hartman. 2006. "The Rise and Fall of Religious Fundamentalism." *Annual Review of Sociology* 32: 127–144. doi:[10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.123141](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.123141).
- Farris, M. P., and S. A. Woodruff. 2000. "The Future of Home Schooling." *Peabody Journal of Education*. The Home Education Movement in Context, Practice, and Theory. 75 (1/2): 233–255. doi:[10.1080/0161956X.2000.9681943](https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2000.9681943).
- Fields-Smith, C., and M. Williams. 2009. "Motivation, Sacrifices, and Challenges: Black Parents' Decisions to Home Educate." *Urban Review* 41: 369–389. doi:[10.1007/s11256-008-0114-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-008-0114-x).
- Francis, D. J., and T. Z. Keith. 2004. "Social Skills of Home Educated and Conventionally Educated Children: A Comparison Study." *Home School Researcher* 16 (1): 15–24.
- Green, C. L., and K. V. Hoover-Dempsey. 2007. "Why Do Parents Home-Educate? A Systematic Examination of Parental Involvement." *Education & Urban Society* 39: 264–285. doi:[10.1177/0013124506294862](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124506294862).
- Gu, C. 2004. *Missionaries and Modern China* (in Chinese). Shanghai: Shanghai people's press.
- Hadderman, M. 2002. *Home-Educating. Trends and Issues* (Report No. RIESEP2003). Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Education Management. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 476001).
- Hong, T. 2006. "Study on Positive Influences of Church Universities on Chinese Higher Education (In Chinese)." *Huzhou Normal University Journal* 4: 75–80.
- Hopwood, V., L. O'Neill, G. Castro, and B. Hodgson. 2007. *The Prevalence of Home Education in England: A Feasibility Study*. Nottingham: DfES Publ.
- Jackson, G. 2009. "'More than One Way to Learn': Home Educated Students' Transitions between Home and School." Unpublished doctoral degree dissertation, Monash University, Clayton.
- Jorgenson, T. M. 2011. "Home-Educating in Iowa: An Investigation of Curricular Choices Made by Home-Educating Parents." PhD dissertation, University of Iowa. <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/1235>
- Kapitulik, B. P. 2011. *Resisting Schools, Reproducing Families: Gender and the Politics of Home-Educating*. Open Access Dissertations. Paper 469.
- Klein, C. 2006. *Virtual Charter Schools and Home Education*. Amherst, NY: Publisher Cambria Press.
- Klicka, C. 2002. *Home Education: The Right Choice*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Kunzman, R. 2009. *Write These Laws on Your Children: Inside the World of Conservative Christian Home-Educating*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Lawrence, M. J. 2007. *Home Education: Status and Bibliography*. New York: Nova Science Publisher.
- Liao, M. S. 2006. "Keeping Home: Home Education and the Practice of Conservative Protestant Identity." Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University. UMI Microform, UMI 3292673.
- Lips, D., and E. Feinberg. 2009. "Home-Educating: The Sleeping Giant of American Education." *USA Today*, 22-24
- Livni, E. 2006. "Keeping the Faith." *ABC NEWS, Muslim Home Education Network*. <http://www.muslimhomeschool.net/hsa/americaHsgrowing.html>
- Lockerbie, D. B. 1994. *A Passion for Learning: The History of Christian Thought on Education*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- Lois, J. 2013. *Home Is Where the School Is: The First Comprehensive Look into the Lives of Home-Educating Mothers*. New York: NYU Press.
- Mayberry, M., G. Knowles, B. Ray, and S. Marlow. 1995. *Home Education: Parents as Educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press/Sage.

- McDowell, S. A. 2000. "The Home Educating Mother-Teacher: Toward a Theory of Social Integration." *Peabody Journal of Education* 75: 187–206.
- McKeon, C. C. 2007. "A Mixed Methods Nested Analysis of Home-Educating Styles, Instructional Practices, and Reading Methodologies." Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Medlin, R. G. 2006. "Home-Educated Children's Social Skills." *Home School Researcher* 17 (1): 1–8.
- Myers, M., and K. Bhopal. 2018. "Muslims, Home Education and Risk in British Society." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39 (2): 212–226. doi:[10.1080/01425692.2017.1406337](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1406337).
- Nelson, J. 2013. "Home Education: Exploring the Views of Parents, Children and Young People." Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham.
- Neuman, A., and O. Guterman. 2016. "The Clash of Two World Views – A Constructivist Analysis of Home Educating Families' Perceptions of Education." *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 24 (3): 359–369. doi:[10.1080/14681366.2016.1178664](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2016.1178664).
- Neuman, A., and O. Guterman. 2018. "Metaphors and Education: Comparison of Metaphors for Education among Parents of Children in School and Home Education." *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 26 (3): 435–447. doi:[10.1080/14681366.2017.1414868](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2017.1414868).
- Parsons, S., and A. Lewis. 2010. "The Home-Education of Children with Special Needs or Disabilities in the UK: Views of Parents from an Online Survey." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14 (1): 67–86. doi:[10.1080/13603110802504135](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504135).
- Planty, M., W. Hussar, T. Snyder, G. Kena, A. Kewal Ramani, J. Kemp, K. Bianco, and R. Dinkes. 2009. *The Condition of Education 2009* (NCES 2009-081). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.
- Princiotta, D., and S. Bielick. 2006. *Home-Educating in the United States: 2003* (NCES 2006-042). U. S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Ray, B. D. 2000. "Home-Educating: The Ameliorator of Negative Influences on Learning?" *Peabody Journal of Education* 75 (1&2): 71–106.
- Roache, L. E. 2009. "Parental Choice and Education: The Practice of Homeseducating in New Zealand." Unpublished dissertation, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Romanowski, M. 2006. "Revisiting the Common Myths about Home Education." *Clearing House* 79 (3): 125–129. doi:[10.3200/TCHS.79.3.125-129](https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.79.3.125-129).
- Romm, T. 1993. "Home Education and the Transmission of Civic Culture." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA.
- Rothermel, P. 2003. "Can We Classify Motives for Home Education?" *Evaluation and Research in Education* 17 (2&3): 74–89. doi:[10.1080/09500790308668293](https://doi.org/10.1080/09500790308668293).
- Rothermel, P. 2010. "Home Education: Practising without Prejudice?" *Every Child Journal* 1 (5): 48–53.
- Rothermel, P. 2011. "Setting the Record Straight: Interviews with a Hundred British Home Educating Families." *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning* 5: 10.
- Saba, L., and J. Gattis. 2002. *The McGraw-Hill Home-Educating Companion*. New York NY: McGraw-Hill Publishers.
- Sheng, X. 2013. "Confucian Work and Home Schooling: A case Study of Home Schooling in Shanghai." *Education and Urban Society*. doi: [10.1177/0013124513489707](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124513489707).
- Sheng, X. 2014. *Learning with Mothers: A Study of Home Schooling in China*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Smedley, T. C. 1992. "Socialisation of Home School Children." *Home School Researcher* 8 (3): 9–16.
- Smith, E., and J. Nelson. 2015. "Using the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to Examine the Prevalence and Characteristics of Families Who Home Educate in the UK." *Educational Studies* 41 (3): 312–325. doi:[10.1080/03055698.2015.1005577](https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2015.1005577).
- Spiegler, T. 2010. "Parent's Motives for Home Education: The Influence of Methodological Design and Social Context." *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 3 (1): 57–70.
- Stevens, M. 2001. *Kingdom of Children*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Thomas, A., and H. Pattison. 2008. *How Children Learn at Home*. New York: Continuum.
- Van Pelt, D. 2003. *Home Education in Canada*. London, ON: Canadian Centre for Home Education.
- Wang, C. 2008. "Study on Missionaries and the Development of Chinese Modern School Education System (In Chinese)." *Journal of Shandong Agricultural Administration Institute* 5: 105–108.

- Webb, S. 2011. "Elective Home Education in the UK." *British Journal of Educational Technology* 42 (5): 18–27.
- White, S., M. Moore, and J. Squires. 2009. "Examination of Previously Home-Educated College Students with the Big Five Model of Personality." *Home School Researcher* 25 (1): 1–7.
- Zhao, R. 2008. "The Influences of Church School on Chinese Modern Education." unpublished doctoral dissertation. Jin Lin University, Ji Lin.