


公教育からの脱却 ー中国のホームスクーリング家庭の事例ー Escaping the Formal Education System: A Case Study of Chinese Homeschooling Families

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ABSTRACT

本論文は、中国西安市においてホームスクーリングの存在理由、およびホームスクーラーが選ぶカリキュラムや学習方法の選択基準、動機、かつ子供の社会化を育む保護者の努力やホームスクーリング自体に対する効果認識を理解するために行われた事例研究に基づき、五組の対象者家族の主要特徴を明らかにするための実証調査である。調査の結果、対象者達のホームスクーリング開始のきっかけは、一貫して公教育制度に対する不快感であることが分かった。公教育のカリキュラムと非公式な学習活動を組み合わせるのが優勢なカリキュラムアプローチであることや、多様なニーズに応じて、それぞれ独自のカリキュラム設計を持っていることが明らかとなった。また、親や生徒達が共通にホームスクーリングの有効性に対する信頼を表明したが、生徒らの学習や遊びを支援する定期的なホームスクーリング集団等がない故、社会化というのが残る課題の一つであった。

For this article a case study was conducted of homeschooling to describe the rationale for homeschooling, as well as decision-making regarding curricula and instruction, and the overall perceived effectiveness of

homeschooling and socialization efforts in Xi'an, China. This article is based on an empirical study to reveal the main characteristics of the five sample families. Feeling uncomfortable about the formal school education system was the common impetus for commencing homeschooling. Combining informal learning activities with a formal curriculum was the prevailing choice amongst the families. As dictated by various needs, each family had their unique curriculum design. All the parents and students expressed their belief in the effectiveness of homeschooling. Socialization seemed to be a problem for these students, however, because there were no regular homeschooling groups to support their study and play.

1. Introduction

Homeschooling is an international movement in which interest “mushroomed in the U.S. and other nations during the 1980s” (Ray, 2001, p. 406). The boom in the homeschooling movement surprised the professional education establishment (Lines, 2000). In the United States, the number of homeschoolers was approximately 1,773,000 in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a), which is 5 to 7 times the number in 1990, when there were only between 250,000 and 350,000 (Lines, 2000). In Australia, the number of homeschoolers has grown 80% from 2012 to 2018, and 19,000 students have registered for home education currently (25% are Christian) (Chapman, 2018). In France, home education has always been legal since 1882 but remains marginal (Bongrand, 2018). Some children involved in extreme religious activity in the small schools led the government to set up stringent laws to govern home education (Taylor & Petrie, 2000). Currently, if families there choose to home school, they must register with a City or State level administrative office (Bongrand, 2018). In Japan, only children having physical or psychological conditions are allowed to stay at home (Taylor & Petrie, 2000).

Modern Chinese homeschooling started after implementing “reform and opening” and “one-child” policies in the year 1978, accompanied by the Chinese government’s and parents’ starting to scrutinize the quality of public education for their children (Qin, 2013). From 1980, China launched

its first issue of the magazine *Parents Should Read*, which was about homeschooling, and many universities and colleges established an abundant array of homeschooling programs and projects for the homeschoolers (Qin, 2013). Then in 1986, China promulgated the Compulsory Education Law, a strict policy of compulsory schooling which required that each child had no choice but to enroll in school (Zheng, 2014). In 2013, 18,000 people paid close attention to homeschooling, and only 2000 families were doing homeschooling according to a report by (21st Century Education Research Institute [CERI], 2013). In 2017, 50,000 people (0.0003% of all Chinese primary and secondary school students) considered homeschooling and practitioners comprised only 6,000 (CERI, 2017). Although the annual growth rate of homeschoolers is nearly 30%, homeschooling is still at an early stage in China: for the public, researchers, media, and educational authorities, it is regarded as mysterious or even abnormal and odd (Sheng, 2014).

2. Background

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States put forth a definition when they initially assessed the homeschool movement there in 1999:

Homeschooled students are those who have been reported by their parents to study at home, are not going to public or private school or not staying more than 25 hours a week, and not staying at home due to temporary illness.

2.1 Benefits of Homeschooling

The benefits of homeschooling are various (Linsench, 2010). Combining different researchers' opinions, six benefits which make homeschooling more attractive can be identified. First, creating a fitting curriculum. Homeschooling families have the freedom to decide what they want to learn and study (Linsench, 2010; Romanowski, 2001). The second is having an effective schedule. Homeschooling families are free to choose their favorite study and life schedule, not needing to struggle with the school calendar (Shaw, 2009). The third is avoiding peer pressure. Homeschoolers can enjoy a relatively pure environment without peer pressure, bullies and competition (Shaw, 2009). The fourth is feeling free to choose and exercise their religion. For religious families, they can combine their faith with daily lives and study at homeschool (Shaw, 2009; Romanowski, 2001). The fifth is attaining academic success. Simmons has indicated that the longer the time parents are involved in children's education, the more likely they are to promote their children's potential and facilitate their academic success (as cited in Romanowski, 2001). The last benefit of Linsench's set of six is that of strengthening the parent-child relationship. Homeschooling provides a good opportunity for parents and children to build tight bonds with each other (Romanowski, 2001) because they "produce more meaningful communication, emotional intimacy, and a closer family life" (Ballman, as cited in Romanowski, 2001, p. 80).

2.2 Rationales for Choosing Homeschooling

In the United States, Van Galen (1988) discussed two prototypes motivated by two primary reasons for choosing homeschooling: ideologues and pedagogues. Ideologues who prefer home education object to what public and private school are teaching and they want to reinforce their relationship with their children (Van Galen, 1988). They also have specific values, beliefs, and skills that they want to

teach their children (Van Galen, 1988). Pedagogues choose home education mainly because they believe schools are not capable of providing quality instruction (Van Galen, 1988). They like to respect their children's creativity and talent, and believe that their children will learn better when pedagogy fits children's desire to learn (Van Galen, 1988).

2.3 Curriculum Choices

According to a three-case study, Clements (2002) reported five types of curricula: (a) prepackaged curriculum; (b) parent-designed; (c) video/ satellite; (d) computer-based; and (e) unschooling. Along with the development of technology and homeschooling publishers, Hanna (2012) concluded five differences from the old curricula: more families (a) use prepared curricula than before; (b) acquire more textbooks from local schools; (c) see the public library as their main resource to use; (d) apply technology to studying; and (e) network more with other families.

2.4 Socialization

Professional educators have argued critically that homeschooled students become educationally and socially handicapped and isolated and that they seldom have opportunities to learn social interaction skills (Romanowski, 2006). Homeschooled students seem to be locked up at home to study from 9:00 to 16:00 without interaction with the outside world (Romanowski, 2006). In fact, Romanowski (2006) argued that homeschool parents care about socialization and offer positive socialization opportunities for their children. Olmstead (2015) found homeschoolers have more opportunities and more free time to attend as many activities as they can. Ray (1999) also discovered that homeschooled children were involved in many activities with peers, children of different ages, and adults outside the home. Ray (1988) discussed that homeschooled students' social ability is comparable or more advanced than that of publically schooled students.

3. Homeschooling in China

3.1 Formal Education in China

In 1985, the Communist Party of China “announced the most wide-ranging reforms of education since the Cultural Revolution” (Lewin, Little, Xu, & Zheng, 1994, p. 1). In May of the same year, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued an important document, *The Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Reform of the Educational System*, which for the first time clarified the compulsory nature of public education. Before 1985, the concept of compulsory education only included five or six years. The official document extended the compulsory period to nine years of education:

The promotion of nine-year compulsory education and having local authorities take charge of elementary education, which is to be administered by departments at different levels, constitutes a basic link in developing education and in reforming its structure (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1985, Translation by Author).

Since the 1950s, China has done a lot to improve education aiming at developing the economy and society, and securing human rights (Rong & Shi, 2001). But there are still difficulties in the education system. The first problem is trying to achieve equality in education (Rong & Shi, 2001). The gap between the genders, majority, and minority, and between urban and rural areas reveals the disparity of economic development in different provinces and the lack of investment in education (Rong & Shi, 2001). The second purported problem is that the school is not a place to learn knowledge, but a score maker. Students need to adjust themselves to be an examination machine. Besides studying at school on weekdays, students need to study at a supplemental training institution for 5.4 hours each week (China Institute for Educational Finance Research-Household Survey, 2017). Both parents and

children complain about the burden of homework and cram school.

3.2 Legal Issues of Homeschooling

While homeschooling is legal in all states in the United States, it is not legal in China. There are two official documents related to homeschooling. The first one is the *Education Law of the People's Republic of China* which suggests that schooling is compulsory. The eighteenth article states the following:

The State implements the nine-year compulsory education system. The people's governments at all levels take various measures to ensure the school-age children and adolescents go to school. The parents or other guardians of school-age children, and the relevant social organizations and individuals have an obligation to enable school-age children and adolescents to receive and complete compulsory education within a prescribed number of years (Education Law of the People's Republic of China of 1995, Translation by Author).

The compulsory education law did not state that students should not study at home. Along with the Old Style Private School (*sishu*, 私塾) and Chinese Classic Reading Class (*dujingban*, 读经班) where students learn on weekdays, becoming popular and attracting the attention of the government, General Office of Ministry of Education issued a significant document, which is the *Notice on the completion of the enrolment in compulsory education in 2017* in Feb. 2017. This MoE official document reveals both the fact that national education policy treats enrollment as a legal requirement and that it clarifies that the potential inconvenience to violators is comprised mainly of being contacted and written up in reports. Part of the fifth and seventh articles follows:

The fifth article: Compulsory education is an education for all school-age children and adolescents. The parents of school-age children or other legal guardians should send these children to school on time and let them receive compulsory education according to the law. In addition to strengthening the monitoring of the key groups which

are at risk of dropping out from school, the education departments of all counties (cities and districts) should pay close attention to students who receive education at social institutions such as private tutoring schools, sinology reading classes, etc. If children of school-age and adolescents fail to enroll in compulsory education according to the Compulsory Education Law, schools and education departments should immediately implement their responsibility for persuasion, registration and reporting. If children need to postpone entrance to school because of their physical health or for other reasons, their parents or other legal guardians should apply for approval at the county education department. If applications are permitted, children can postpone entering, but they cannot learn at home instead of compulsory education implemented by the state (General Office of Ministry of Education, 2017, Translation by Author).

The seventh article: Given the unique needs of a few school-age children and adolescents, such as delaying enrollment, leaving school or self-actualizing through compulsory education, we should undertake policy propagation work for their parents or other legal guardians in advance, to enhance the strength of notification and interpretation. It is necessary by law to supervise and correct the violation of the compulsory education law (General Office of Ministry of Education, 2017, Translation by Author).

3.3 Previous Studies about Chinese Homeschooling

Compared to the American context, relatively few academic studies have been conducted on Chinese home education (Sheng, 2014). Some researchers have compared Chinese and American homeschooling. He (2012) analyzed the reason and legitimacy. Lu (2014) identified the difficulties and the countermeasures for Chinese homeschooling relative to American experiences. Wang and Zhu (2015) analyzed the differences in homeschooling curricula by comparing the moral values, textbook use and curriculum value. Li (2015) mainly examined the differences of rationales

for homeschooling between the two countries.

Some researchers have focused on Chinese home education. Zheng (2014) divided homeschooling families into three categories according to their educational patterns. First, self-sufficient homeschooling: children are educated at home by parents. The second is cooperative homeschooling: several families support each other to teach and learn, such as various education communities in Dali City, Yunnan Province. The last one is an embryonic form of micro-school, such as Naxi Academy in Chongqing and Mengmutang in Shanghai. Sheng (2015) did a case study of Mengmutang. Sheng (2018b) compared several Confucian (sinology) micro-schools in southern China. Sheng (2018a) interviewed 30 Chinese Christian mothers in Beijing and generated the homeschooling motivations, types, teaching content, and teaching methods and outcomes.

Thus far, no study has been done about homeschooling in northwest China, nor specifically about families of religions other than Christianity. This study gave a new and comparative look at the condition of four Christian and one Taoist families in northwest China. The families in that area face more social pressure and have fewer resources than families in South China because the north is less open than the south, and the economy is not as strong as in the south. The study set out to outline some basic aspects of their lived experience, including rationale for homeschooling, curricula and instruction, effectiveness of homeschooling, and socialization efforts.

4. Methodology

In a case study conducted in an urban setting in northwest China, qualitative data were collected through a survey, interviews, and one observation. These data were analyzed to identify the rationale for homeschooling, curricular and instructional decision-making, the overall effectiveness of homeschooling, and socialization efforts of homeschooling families.

This study was conducted in Xi'an City, the largest

city in the northwest region of China (Xi'an Government, 2017). The comprehensive strength of science and education of Xi'an ranked third in 2017 (Xi'an Government, 2017). According to the *Xi'an statistical bulletin for the development of education (basic education and vocational high school) in 2017* (Xi'an Education Bureau, 2017), the enrollment rate of the primary school age population in Xi'an was 99.99%, and the enrollment rate of the junior high school age was 99.98%.

Data were collected from five homeschooling families from Xi'an City. Three instruments were used to collect data for this study: a survey adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics (2012b) of the United States; supporting parent interviews; and homeschooling observations. The survey for the current study employed 37 questions across four parts: child's homeschooling, family activities, child's family and household. One parent from each family filled in the survey. While the participants were completing the survey, the first researcher sat beside them explaining parts of the survey the participants could not completely understand and checking their answers for clarity as they were being written. The in-depth interview questions were designed by the researcher to inquire about curriculum choice issues in detail. To determine how the homeschooled children were studying at home, the researcher observed two participants' families.

To counter the risk of inconvenience to participating families, of which they were all fully aware, all measures were taken to protect their anonymity, including the use of pseudonyms and avoidance of presenting identifying information. The researcher asked the students to give themselves a preferred English nickname to use in this article, rather than using actual names.

5. Findings

5.1 Common Family Demographics

These five families in this study all lived in the city. Two parents had held bachelor degrees; four had attained associate degrees; one had finished some graduate or professional education without obtaining a degree or qualification; one had completed some college with no qualification; and the last two had gotten high school diplomas or below. The higher education attainment of these parents roughly corresponded with the *21st CERI Report* (2017), which asserted that above 80% of homeschooling parents have received higher education. One family's two parents had been formal school teachers before they implemented online education; one parent of another family had set up a tiny school; the other three families' parents were running a family-style a kindergarten or after-school supervision. This condition was also corroborated by the *21st CERI report* (2017), which stated that in most homeschooling families at least one parent has teaching experience; thus, almost half of homeschooling parents have teaching experience.

Sample families included girls (80%) more than boys (20%). Three families (60%) had two children. The *21st CERI Report* (2017) reported that one-child families made up the vast majority of homeschooling families, while boys (59%) are more numerous than girls (41%).

One student in this study had never been to school. In 2017, she was enjoying her ninth year of homeschooling. One student was studying in the seventh year, while the other two were in their fourth year. One student had less than two years of homeschooling experience. That likewise corroborated a formerly published pattern in which 70% of homeschooling students were seen to have less than two year's studying experience at home (CERI, 2017).

In Table 1, the details of homeschooling are described in the order of family number. The basic aspects of each family's homeschooling contained

Table 1.
Five children's general educational background

Family No.	1	2	3	4	5
Child's name	Shirley	Grace	Dora	Jason	Candy
Parents' religion	Christian	Christian	Christian	Taoist	Christian
Student' age	12	12	11	10	9
Gender	Girl	Girl	Girl	Boy	Girl
Kindergarten	Family style kindergarten	Home	Kindergarten	Kindergarten & home	Kindergarten
Grade 1	School	Home	School	School	Home
Grade 2	School	Home	School	Home	Home
Grade 3	1st term school 2nd term home	Home	School	Home	Home
Grade 4	Home	Home	1st term school 2nd term home	Home	Home
Grade 5	Home	Home	Home	Home	Not yet
Grade 6	Home	Home	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet
Grade 7	Home	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet
Which grade are they studying now?	7	6	5	5	4
How long have they studied at home?	4 years	9 years	1 year	7 years	4 years
Who mainly provides the home education instruction	Mother	Mother & Father	Herself	Father	Father

Note. Names are pseudonyms that the students chose for themselves. Grade and ages were recorded in November 2017.

the rationale for homeschooling, curriculum and instructional choices, the overall effectiveness of homeschooling, and socialization efforts.

5.2 Five Homeschooling Cases

5.2.1 Shirley's homeschool

Shirley studied at a home-style kindergarten which was set up by her mother. Previously she had been a private school student for two and a half years. The homeschool journey for her started from the second term of grade three. Three main reasons led her mother to decide to begin that journey. The first reason was she was dissatisfied with aspects of

the school environment, such as safety and peer pressure problems. Using scores as a standard to make friends was Shirley's new habit formed at school. She even asked her teacher several times to change her desk mate because that student's English was too bad to communicate with her. However, her mother felt she did things based more and more on utilitarianism, which disturbed her mother. The second reason was homeschooling could provide more morals and English instruction. Shirley's mother said:

Moral education at school is the cultivation of stigma culture. If you do not do well, you will be criticized or

accused. “Face culture” which is very popular has many negative effects on school education. The right way should be teaching students how to do things right, not letting them feel shyness or disgrace. The moral problem is not only a problem at school, but also a problem of the greater society.

English instruction was also important. As Shirley’s mother’s opined, studying abroad was not too necessary, but English was a tool for Shirley to communicate with the world. Shirley’s mother talked confidently: “Good English gave me the courage to choose homeschooling and a way to understand the advantages of homeschooling.” The last reason was also the most critical reason, which was that Shirley’s mother complained about academic instruction at formal school. She said:

Knowledge structure, learning methods and various tests—examination-oriented education at school—are not suitable for children’s learning because their scores are the only goal for a student to pursue. Students who only study for high scores will grow weaker in the future. Anyway, I feel that the teaching content and ability development are not taught well enough at school.

Unexpectedly, religion was not the influential factor leading the family to have their student study at home, nor was it influential for choosing a curriculum. Shirley’s mother said: “If she studies at formal school, we can also study the religious values at home. Learning the Bible and sinology books are not the reason to keep her back from school.” Moreover, Shirley’s mother seldom took the initiative to talk about religion during the whole interview.

The curriculum that Shirley followed was a combination of formal curriculum and informal learning. Usually, her mother bought all the textbooks in her grade level and checked the syllabus of each subject. Afterward, she designed each term’s learning schedule, combing the formal school’s content with informal learning to meet the student’s and parents’ needs. The subjects taught in this family school were

Chinese, math, English, experimental science, computer science (computer programming), ideology and morality, art and music. Chinese, math, and English—considered the three main courses in China—were taught using the formal curriculum. Reading books (Chinese classical ancient prose, Bible, and compulsory reading books for middle school students), and studying once a week at cram school was the way to learn Chinese. Studying the formal school textbooks; doing exercises; and going to cram school once a week comprised her strategies for learning math. An online English learning website, *Reading A-Z*, was the main source for foreign language (English) instruction. Reading various books, attending a short-term workshop, and doing group study with other children comprised the approaches taken for informal learning of the other subjects. They also did other activities like: visiting a library, bookstore or museum; going to a play or concert; and attending an event sponsored by a religious group. During the entire learning day, Shirley was a self-study student. Her parents’ roles were to make the plan, check her progress and homework, and give instruction when needed.

This homeschool teacher and student were all satisfied with their homeschooling effectiveness. Shirley’s mother said: “My daughter only uses half the time of formal school students used to finish the same study. Therefore, she can spend more time playing the piano, swimming and studying some other subjects.” Another reason given for the effectiveness of their approach was that their schedule was flexible. For example, Shirley used her studying time to play piano when she was preparing the piano grading test. Also, enjoying skateboarding could occupy reading time. Although regular studying was disturbed in the short term, the student could quickly catch up on the work. These sorts of flexible arrangements never seemed to happen at school. However, Shirley wanted to go back to

school because she felt a little lonely at home sometimes. In order to help her experience what school life was really like, her mother took her to visit some middle schools and talk with the students. Finally, she abandoned the idea after comparing homeschooling and formal school.

In her spare time, Shirley played with the group study friends or new friends. Meanwhile, she had the chance to meet with the students whom her mother supervised after school at her home.

5.2.2 Grace's homeschool

Grace's homeschool was always carried out around Christianity. Religion as the core reason to start homeschooling, had changed this family's lifestyle a lot. Three family members "met god" at the same time when Grace was eight and a half years old. Her values were changed a lot after she "knew God" and read the Bible. She used the religious teaching she had learned at home to query her favorite book—*Wisdom in Chinese Proverbs*, and cartoons—*Journey to the West*, *Pleasant Goat and Big Wolf*, *Big Ear Tutu*. She told her mother:

Wisdom in Chinese Proverbs did not mention that people should support each other, but God asks people to do it. For example, a fallen old grandma cannot stand up by herself from the ground if no one helps her. In *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong helped the Tang Monk a lot, but the Tang Monk read the magic spell to punish Sun Wukong. In *Pleasant Goat and Big Wolf*, Red Wolf is the only one character to get married. However, her husband did not feel happy because Red Wolf never helped him to catch sheep. All the sheep in the sheep village followed the village head to be here and there but never get married.

Several other reasons were considered by Grace's parents as well, as they made the decision to homeschool her. They were both formal school teachers, and they quit their jobs to be freelancer teachers. They deeply understood the advantages and disadvantages of formal education, and they decided

on homeschooling before Grace reached enrollment age, so they never sent Grace to kindergarten or formal school. From the parents' view, they were worried about the school's educational environment and the academic quality there. In contrast, they felt homeschooling would be a good way to give more religious, moral, and English instruction. Also, cultivating in their daughter the value of simplicity was their wish.

Grace's homeschool used a mixed curriculum of formal and informal elements. Grace began to contact subject learning from when she was nine years old. Before that, reading and listening to the books were her only methods to get knowledge. Books were the Chinese version of foreign picture books, *Tsinghua Children Chinese Enlightenment*, *Tsinghua Children English Enlightenment*, and *Wisdom in Chinese Proverbs*. Grace's parents did not randomly start subject learning before they had found a set of teaching materials that fit their needs. Their final choice was McGuffey, which uses Biblical values as its stated standard. Chinese, English, math, science, social science, arts, and music were the subjects she learned. The only formal school textbook used was sixth-grade math when Grace was eleven years old. She also finished more than ten tutoring materials at the same time. Grace's mother said that one year's experience influenced Grace a lot:

We chose the best tutoring materials for her. She spent more than three hours doing the exercises every day. We found that she did not enjoy the studying. One thing Grace cared about was whether she had done the exercises correctly. In this mode, her thinking became so unitary that she dared not solve the problem with self-confidence. So, I discontinued her doing that, although she was not willing to stop at first. I thought using formal school textbooks for learning—Chinese, Politics, and English—these three subjects were not good, but I felt they were not bad for science related subjects. I found out that I was wrong through trial and error.

This homeschool used the McGuffey series as foundation textbooks; then added some other science books. To enrich her study life, they sometimes took Grace to a library, bookstore, museum, zoo, or church. Running with her mother in the morning and evening was not only to exercise, but also to communicate the ideas between mother and daughter. Self-study was the main learning method used, and instruction was supplemental.

After nine years of homeschooling experience, Grace changed her mother's perception of education. They came to feel she had had plenty of time to choose the best curricula for the student, plus diverse learning strategies, such as being a volunteer at an orphanage, purchasing household goods, and visiting friends with parents. They planned to continue the homeschooling through high school.

Grace usually spent time with friends in formal school before turning nine years old. After that, she was too busy to play with other children, and so were they. In reflection, her father said about the availability of fellow homeschooling playmates: "the number of homeschooling students is very small, especially in northwest China."

5.2.3 Dora's homeschool

Dora's homeschool was a little different from the previous two above. She mainly studied by herself, seldom with parental involvement because her parents needed to work more than 50 hours per week. This was the only family in which only the homeschooling student was interviewed.

According to Dora's father, choosing homeschooling was because he was worried about the school environment and wanted to give his daughter religious education. Meanwhile, the school could not meet some special needs of Dora's. The most important reason was that he was discontent with the quality of formal school education. Dora said her parents asked her to study at home because her scores at school were very low. The last term there, she had failed in

the math exam.

Dora's father said their homeschool used informal learning, but it sometimes adopted a formal curriculum. Every morning, Dora got up and went to her father's business shop to study. Chinese, English, and math were the three subjects she learned every weekday. Doing two hours' worth of sketches was her extracurricular activity, which she did at painting school on the weekend. Reading one book per week and writing a reaction to the book; reciting the Bible from memory; and journaling in a diary were assigned for Chinese Language Arts. Learning five to ten pages of the formal school textbook and copying the problems from that book to be tested on were her task for math. Using 40 minutes to grasp one lesson of *New Concept English Book One* comprised her English study agenda. Dora's daily homeschool schedule was not complicated. Her father checked her assignment occasionally. After the interview, Dora asked the researcher how a homeschool student could enter university. She was very excited after the researcher explained how to take a self-study higher education examination because she had a university in mind, which she dreamed of entering someday.

Dora was satisfied with the self-study approach to homeschooling, because she did not need to get up early in the morning, and she no longer worried about the test scores anymore. This also meant her father would not be angry with her low scores.

She felt lonely sometimes, however. At her father's business shop, she could contact some adults but seldom played with peers.

5.2.4 Jason's homeschool

Jason's homeschool was influenced by Taoism because his parents were Taoist. Jason father's views about education formed the motives for deciding to start homeschooling. Jason's father had pondered over the question of how to reform education since he was a first-year junior high school student. He said:

When I was in the first grade of junior high school,

schools began to reform education, especially English. So, I myself wondered how to reform education. I really noticed the changes when comparing the new English textbook and the old one. After a long time, I discovered a new problem: students' pressure stayed very high and study efficiency did not change. Until my child entered school, reformation of education continued. Then I realized that education was unable to be reformed. I came to feel that there is no hope to expect some thing that kept on changing for decades to become good.

Because Jason's father had a terrible impression of school, three things happened regarding school that strengthened his belief in letting his son study at home. First, when Jason was studying at the middle shift in kindergarten, seven children got infected with hand foot and mouth disease. The kindergarten did not close classes but kept the information secret, preventing the community from learning about the contagion. So, Jason's father asked his wife to take him back home. Jason's father said: "I was supposed to let him study at school until middle school and take him back from school if he feels tired at school." However, the harsh reality did not let his plan come true and forced him to advance homeschooling. The second thing was Jason's study ability, which declined after entering primary school. Jason acquired the ability of free reading and addition and subtraction through one hundred during the one and a half years homeschooling at kindergarten stage. He did not progress in his studies but regressed.

The last straw for Jason's father was when he noticed Jason could not complete his homework until eight or nine o'clock. Having no time to play was not acceptable by his father. Jason thoroughly studied at home from the second term of grade two. The educational mission of Jason's homeschool was "seeking the truth, getting happiness, having great freedom," as summarized by his father.

Jason's homeschool used informal learning more than a formal curriculum would. He had a regular life every day. He got up at 6 a.m., then exercised for

two hours with his father. During the first hour, he did horse stance for 40 minutes, did 50 push-ups, lifted 14 kg dumbbells 50 times, did 150 sit-ups, and 80 wall squats at home. He also did Tai chi sword and shadow boxing twice one day. At 9 a.m., Jason wrote down his daily schedule before studying. Reading classical books was the content of his Chinese Language Arts study. For example, he would read an entire chapter of three sinology classics—*The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Scripture of Ethics*—once, do other selected reading and then recite *The Book of Changes* when the researcher visited his home. Jason studied using a formal school math textbook. Rosetta Stone (an online app) and the *Bookworm of Oxford* were the two English resources he used. Practicing calligraphy and Go, each once a week outside the home were his other two scheduled activities. The other subjects like ideology and morality, politics, geoscience, biology, physics, chemistry, geography, computer science and social science were worked on by reading the encyclopedia and listening to Jason's father's stories. Like Grace and Shirley, Jason also used the library, bookstore, museum, and zoo, and he attended activities organized by different organizations as well.

No relatives supported their choice for homeschooling in the beginning. Sometimes, Jason parents' relatives got together to criticize them, asking why they had made this choice. But they were firm and self-confident in their choice. The good thing was Jason's parents had the same opinion about education and they supported each other. They had the idea that homeschool could give their son a rich childhood.

Jason had the chance to play with other homeschooling students, but the time was limited because every student was quite busy. Jason's father planned to run a school, which could enroll some other students. Jason could get a chance to play and study with these students. His father had the idea to provide more social chances for his son. Unfortunately, it was difficult to find a like-minded partner to run the school with.

5.2.5 Candy's homeschool

Candy's father chose several different reasons to homeschool in the questionnaire. He wanted to give her more moral, English, religious education, and he was concerned about her safety at home. More generally, he wanted to try a nontraditional educational style instead of sending his daughter to formal school.

Candy's homeschool also arranged learning informally, more than using a formal curriculum. Her father made up a study plan for the term and the month, and she just needed to follow this. Reading *Model Chinese Reading*, the Bible, and many extracurricular books was the content of her Chinese Language Art study. Candy learned using the Oxford Reading Tree (English textbook), wrote an English diary, and studied two English online Apps: Rosetta Stone and English Fun Dubbing. Her father was very proud of her fluent spoken English. She had completed the dubbing for 1650 songs from 40 movies.

Candy used a formal school textbook and exercises for Math. Writing two math tests or papers each week was an additional task. Candy was the only student who was learning a third language. She had been studying Japanese online for nine months when the researcher conducted the interview. Arts subjects like piano, drawing, and handcrafts were learned by self-study at home. She read books for science, geography, and biography. In addition to becoming familiar with books, Candy ran two kilometers and did exercise in the morning. Public resources, such as libraries, museums, and zoos were also important places for Candy to learn.

The core idea of Candy's homeschool was to: know God; do your best; love other people as you love yourself; and cultivate independent thinking ability, writing abilities, and a disposition for life-long learning. Candy's father said homeschooling was full of fun.

Candy usually played with the nearby children

who were more available during the summer holiday.

6. Discussion

By comparing characteristics of five homeschools, it can be seen that some similarities and differences can be identified in the following aspects.

6.1 Rationale for Homeschooling

In the questionnaire, eight alternative items are about the informants' reasons for choosing homeschooling. A common view amongst parents was that they were not satisfied with the academic education given at formal school. Three families clarified that dissatisfaction was their primary reason for starting to homeschool. The other two families were more inclined to pick other reasons as the most critical. One Christian family preferred more religious education, while the Taoist family wished to seek the truth and get happiness.

6.2 Curricular and Instructional Decision-Making

All families designed the curricula they used by mixing formal and informal learning activities. Chinese, English, and Math were the three common subjects amongst the five families. Formal learning was seen as most suitable for English and math, especially the latter. Math was the only subject for which families used formal school math textbooks. Four of the five were using it when the researcher collected the data. However, one family had abandoned it after using it one year. Although they did not adopt any formal school textbooks for English, each family had carefully selected books and online learning software. Other subjects chosen by each family were different. The main ways to learn these subjects were by reading various books and building experiential knowledge from real life. Utilizing public resources enriched the lives of homeschooling students. Most families also chose to focus on the importance of exercise. Parents may somewhat feel a lack of confidence in letting their children only study at home as students' age

increases, and one parent purchased education from cram school.

Religion was an aspect that was impossible to ignore. Four students from the Christian homes read the Bible while one student recited *The Scripture of Ethics* that is one of the representative works of Taoism. It was easy to detect a strong religious element at Grace and Jason's homeschools. These two families connected their religion more strongly with homeschooling than the other three families, judging by the interview and questionnaire.

6.3 Overall Effectiveness of Homeschooling

Both parents and students expressed their view that homeschooling was effective. Some of the students viewed the advantages of their home study experience by comparing it with their previous formal school. The student with no formal school experience positively associated her homeschooling with the Christian context of learning.

6.4 Socialization Efforts of Homeschooling Families

Five students had some time to play with peers, if limited. One interviewee said every homeschooling student had a different schedule, frequently making it difficult to play together. In the United States, the homeschooling cooperative (or "co-op") provides a significant chance for homeschooling students to get more socialization opportunities (Anthony, 2015). In Xi'an, the number of homeschooling students is extremely low. No regular cooperative or study group was set up. Although there were not enough supports to adequately promote socialization, parents did not exhibit anxiety about this problem.

7. Implications

This study used a case study approach to examine the experiences of five families in one Chinese city, and findings emerged regarding their experiences of

individual homeschooling without using coops or study groups. Previous studies on homeschooling in China have not emphasized this sort of individualism, and it would therefore be informative to compare locales across China in future studies. Meanwhile, no data was used from secular families, so in future studies different types of families should be recruited, in order to understand the characteristics of Chinese homeschooling in greater depth. Moreover, the matter of local education authorities' responses to homeschooling deserves empirical attention as well.

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