Ya Chen

Chinese Parents’ Perspectives on Parenting: Children’s Education and Future Prospects
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A growing literature about the influence of parenting on children’s academic development blossoms. However, most of it focuses on quantitative aspects. Meanwhile, little is known about parents’ views on parenting in contemporary mainland China, where parenting is affected not only by Confucianism but also by economic reforms and globalization. The present study examined 23 parents’ perceptions on parenting by a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The objective of this study was to examine how Chinese parents construct parenting in contemporary China and their expectations towards their children’s education and future prospects in general. The parents were selected by snowballing in primary schools in China. Narrative thematic analysis was used.

Findings demonstrated that Confucianism and economic reforms has been shaping Chinese parents’ parental behaviors with respect to their perceptions on children’s childhood and Chinese education, perceptions on parenting and their expectations on children’s education and future prospects. Generally, nearly all participants held negative beliefs towards the current Chinese education, in which the educational and funding structure is elitist, teaching and learning aim at the examinations and key schools, and heavy-loaded study deprives children of their nature, freedom, and wellbeing.

Hierarchy and filial piety still are essential elements in a Chinese family. However, there are increasing signs of democracy in parent-child relations and decision making. Although parents still play a leading role in designing their children’s education and future prospects, children were encouraged to express their opinions and make decisions. All the participants recognized their role in children’s education. They all considered that they fully participated in their children’s education and were responsive to children’s academic needs and other interests.
Education and scholar still enjoy the highest priority in contemporary Chinese family. Most parents attached great importance to degrees and educational attainment. Although university is not the only way to success, almost all the participants showed their preference to university or key university. Jobs less related to manual labor were preferred by almost all the participants. Each participant emphasized effort as the most important way to success. Some participants placed great importance upon the cultivation of children’s emotional intelligence, emphasizing individual happiness and individual satisfaction. Moral education is still prioritized.

Avainsanat – Keywords
Chinese education, parenting, parenting styles, parents’ expectations, narrative thematic analysis
1 Introduction

Nowadays, as the structure and dynamics of family life has evolved, there is increasing attention on the theme of what constructs responsible and effective parenting (Holden, 2010). Parenting refers to activities where parents exert their influence on children’s development in physic, emotion, social ability, morality and intelligence (Faircloth at el, 2013; Brook, 2012). Empirical research has highlighted the significant and long-lasting influence of parenting on children’s every aspect of developmental accomplishments. For instance, previous literature indicates that parents’ attitudes, behaviors as well as activities in relation to their children’s education affect children’s academic performance (Wilder, 2014). Children from controlling but unresponsive families are more likely to perform better in school and less involved in problem behavior, but show a lower level in social skills, self-esteem and higher level in depression than their counterparts who are raised by highly demanding and highly responsive parents (Darling, 1999).

How parents go about parenting is significantly influenced by their expectations of children and parenting, which in turn are based on parents’ life experiences and the cultural values of the society (Holden, 2010). In contemporary mainland China, parents’ parenting goals and practices have been undergoing changes within the framework of Confucianism and economic reforms (Luo, Tamis-LeMonda, & Song, 2013), which has resulted in changes in parental expectations and parenting practices. Three decades’ extensive economic reform in China as well as globalization have led to a wide acceptance of children’s rights and a more competitive social environment. Childrearing has become a focal point of the family’s attention. Additionally, the contradiction between quality education and examination-driven educational system also has an effect on Chinese parents’ parenting choices (Dello-Iacovo, 2009).
Although literature about parenting has blossomed in the last decades, most of it is qualitative and focuses on early childhood education and adolescence, emphasizing the relations between academic outcomes and parenting, comparisons between Chinese parenting and the Western parenting (e.g., Leung et al., 2010; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010; Ng et al., 2014; Huang & Gove, 2015). The respondents in the previous literature were mainly from Tai Wan, Hong Kong, or Chinese living abroad while fewer studies give an overall picture of the contemporary mainland Chinese (e.g., Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen & Murtuza, 2013; Yang, Kuo, Wang & Yang, 2014). There is a lack of qualitative investigations on contemporary Chinese parenting concerning children’s daily life and wellbeing. Concluded from seventeen representative journals in China, there were only two articles using qualitative research among 228 articles on parenting from 1981 to 2008 (Zou, 2008). In the last decades, a large volume of literature on parenting resurfaced. However, the qualitative research still constitutes a very small part of all the empirical research. The most representative qualitative study is Luo Feng’s (2002) “Success and Parenting- An Exploration on How the Students in Peking University Were Brought up”. He enriched the contemporary research into parenting through investigating nine students in Peking University about how they were raised up. Meanwhile, few studies explored the current situation of contemporary Chinese parenting systematically while most previous studies have focused on parenting styles (Luo, 2005). To address this gap, emphasis should be given to an in-depth analysis of parents’ experiences and perceptions in order to understand contemporary Chinese parenting as well as Chinese parents’ views on their children’s education and future prospects.

In the present study, data were collected from twenty three Chinese parents with children in primary schools by a questionnaire. The collected thematic written narrations were analyzed by narrative thematic analysis. This study will provide an overall picture of current Chinese parenting, as well as a detailed base for understanding and reflection on effective parenting.

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to investigate the Chinese parents’ parenting experience and their perceptions on parenting. In Chapter 2 the main focus is placed on the background of this study. Economic reform and quality education in China will be analyzed. Chapter 3 provides the significance of this study and proposes three main research questions.
In Chapter 4, the emphasis is placed within a theoretical framework, where Confucianism as well as the related parenting literature in the western world are discussed. The key concepts discussed here are Confucianism, Chinese education, parenting, parenting styles and Chinese parents’ expectations on their children’s education and future prospects. In Chapter 5, research methodology is introduced with respect to narrative research, data collection, data analysis procedures and ethical issues.

Chapter 6 addresses the findings followed by the outcome of the study which is analyzed according to three main research questions and theoretical framework. Themes were identified in the literature and emerged from the data: parents’ perceptions on childhood and education, perceptions on parenting and children’s education, and expectations on children’s education and future prospects.

Lastly, Chapter 7 comprises of the discussion, limitations of the study and implication for further research in this field.
2 Background of Research

Parenting is a society-dependent process. In the last decades, dramatic historical transformations have taken place in Chinese society due to the economic reforms and globalization (Wang & Chang, 2010). In this section, I will go through some implications of economic reforms on Chinese parenting within the framework of Confucianism and Chinese education.

2.1 Economic Reform in China

Since 1978, China has been undergoing a period of dramatic social transformation, which has resulted in multiple and profound changes in Chinese economy, society and culture. One area in which such changes take place is people’s ideology (Zou, 2008). The foundation of the socialist market economy and the shifts in the economic model are bound to instigate enormous changes in people’s thinking and values (Yan, 2010). Meanwhile, it appears that Chinese people have gradually adjusted themselves to some Western cultural values, such as the ideology of democracy and individualism (Yan, 2010).

The Chinese economic reform is a set of economic reforms launched in 1979 aiming to boost Chinese economy according to the national conditions. Its guidelines are to “emancipate the mind” and “seek the truth from facts”. One of the fundamental elements of economic reform is democracy (Deng, 1978). Among those reforms, “opening up policy” vitalized the import and export of China by initiating four special economic zones along the coast at the beginning of the reforms (Wang, 2013). In the following stages, the reform sought to decentralize economic policymaking, particularly in trade and liberating the market from the state (George, 2013). For instance, more open cities and development zones were established
for the purpose of attracting foreign investments; the removal of trade barriers imported more foreign investment which generated tougher competition for the employees.

“Opening up policy” and globalization have brought an unparalleled scale of interaction between China and the west, thereby the influence of the western culture has reached the peak. One of these influences is the prevalence of the ideology of democracy and individualism. For instance, Chinese people are more liberal and pro-democratic in the 2000s than they were in 1990s. Along with the improvement in politics, economy and culture, people may attach more importance to the social democracy, the legal system, and the protection and promotion of the individual rights (Yan, 2010). Individual factors have become the central factors when Chinese people assess their own happiness and life satisfaction (Steele & Lynch, 2013). People are intrigued to show more respect to individual’s value. Subsequently, the values of children and the protection of children’s rights have been widely accepted in China (Zou, 2008).

In addition, the transition from a planning economy into decentralized market economy has led to a tougher social environment (Chen, Wang, & Wang, 2009), which may also affect parenting goals and practices. On the one hand, in a planned economy with underdeveloped legal infrastructure, harmonious relationships played a vital role in the achievement of individual goals (Tamis-LeMonda, Way, Hughes, Yoshikawa, Kalman & Niwa, 2008). Before the economic reform, university graduate from the university was guaranteed a permanent job by the government. However, since the late 1990s, they need to take the responsibility and the authority for finding a job (Guthrie, 2012). In such a situation, educational certificates play an important role in finding a good, steady and meaningful job, which is characterized by a good salary and a respectable social status.

On the other hand, the Chinese market economy with a Western-style infrastructure challenges Chinese labor force. Scholars, foreign enterprises and media articles stressed Chinese students’ comparatively lower ability in innovation (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Meanwhile, it is declared that the ability to cultivate innovative and talent labor force determines the rise and fall of a nation in the world which is characterized by increasing global competition and rapid technological development (Thogerson, 2000).
2.2 Confucianism

Confucianism, as another dominant factor, has been shaping the Chinese education and parenting. Put forth by the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-491 BC) and his disciples, Confucianism is a constellation of philosophical rules and beliefs on morality, society, and politics (Luo et al., 2013). It dictates how a person relates to others, focusing on people’s daily conduct and practices. Confucianism has been the most influential philosophy, which shapes people’s behaviors, family and community in East Asian countries. Drawing upon psychological research and educational reforms in modern China, Confucian thoughts are still visible in contemporary Chinese thinking and behavior regardless of the profound influence of Western philosophy upon Chinese society (Curran, 2014). One of the areas where Confucianism plays a guiding role is education and parenting. Particularly, Confucian values are embedded deeply in Chinese education, parent-child relations and parents’ expectations. Thus, in order to comprehend parents’ perceptions on parenting in contemporary China, it is crucial to understand Confucianism and its influence on education and parenting. The meaning of Confucianism differs by social contexts and historical periods. Here, the book *Analects of Confucius*, a collection of Confucius philosophy but written by Confucius’ disciples, is used as a theoretical backdrop.

Confucius emphasized the significance of education for a society and an individual. He advocated the government should manage a country through virtue. The ultimate goal of Confucianism was to educate the learner to achieve overall perfection and to be a virtuous officer according to humanism, hierarchy and harmony (Luo et al., 2013). In this study, four developmental goals acquiring knowledge, social norms, filial piety and harmonious relationship will be analyzed. In that time, education was not only the way to differentiate individuals but an approach for individuals to achieve their goals to be an officer. Individual success was defined as one’s contribution to the society and the approval from the society, which was determined by one’s education, occupation and moral character (Tao & Hong, 2013; Lien, 2006; Park & Chesla, 2007). More detailed information will be presented in the literature review.
2.3 Overview of Chinese Education

The above flow chart “education system and flow” shows that basic education in China comprises preschool education, primary education and secondary education. Voluntary preschool kindergarten starts from age 3 to age 6. Compulsory schooling begins at age 6, and ends at age 18. Around the age of 15, students are channeled into two routines after Junior Secondary School: Routine 1: senior secondary school (general secondary school 3 years) and secondary vocational education (specialized/ vocational/ technical secondary education), and Routine 2: vocational school (3 years). Only students in Routine 1 have the opportunity to attend the National College Entrance Examination. Most of them are from

![Chinese Education System and Student Flow diagram](http://www.ncee.org/programs-affiliates/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/shanghai-china/shanghai-china-instructional-systems/shanghai-system-3/)

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general secondary schools. After National College Entrance Examination, part of the students enter universities (4 years) for further study and part of them enter the colleges and professional schools of higher education (3 years). After the study in colleges and professional schools of higher education, some students can continue their study to get a bachelor’s degree. Students in vocational school cannot participate in the National College Entrance Examination, rather, they can get diplomas from institutions of adult higher education through full-time, part-time or distance study. University study is the base of the master’s degree study and doctorate degree study. Dropouts, students who fail in Senior Secondary School Entrance Examination and National College Entrance Examination are directly channeled into the labor market. Senior secondary school-university study is the most academic and prestigious school track. Even though years of education reform took place, the current education system is still examination-centered and highly structured under the governing principle *quality education* (Dello-Iacovo, 2009).

In the 1990s, evidences showed that few Chinese labor force would be competent for work in an international environment as the education preferred theory and examination to other skills, particularly practical skills and creative skills (Kundu, 2006). However, the exam-centered pressures were further exacerbated (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). The old curriculum was proven too problematic and narrow to meet the demands of global labor force. Therefore, through the 1990s, the concept of *quality education* eventually serve as one of the guiding principles for education policy (Lou, 2011).

*Quality education* was first proposed in 1985 as a reaction to the needs of the economic development. As an antidote to examination-centered education, *Quality* highlights individual performance while *quality education* is generally defined a relatively holistic education which aims to foster well rounded and skilled person and highlights individual performance (Lou, 2011). *Quality education* highlights the cultivation of students’ potentials, abilities and courage for lifelong learning and development (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Nowadays, well-rounded students are interpreted as students who are not only excellent in academic outcomes but also perform well in other skills, for instance, playing the piano, drawing, or dancing.

From the 1990s till today, a wide variety of *quality education* reforms have taken place, in order to develop well-rounded individuals and keep pace with the booming of knowledge
economy and the increasing competitive global environment. Here I will take the *quality education* curriculum reforms as an example. There have been eight curriculum reforms since 1945 which have attempted to foster innovative competence, independent thinking, practical ability and social skills (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). The government has been attempting to apply student-centered teaching approaches into the education system, reform traditional rote learning away from the teaching materials and methodologies, reduce the importance of examinations and the amount of students’ workloads, and adjust the examination content, curriculum, and assessment approaches (Lou, 2011). Furthermore, since the 1990s a growing publicity has been initiating parenting education programs which aim to improve the wellbeing of young people (Dello-Iacovo, 2009).

However, in practice, the reduction of students’ workload or the extension of the curriculum is not supported by parents as expected for the fear that these measures will impede their children’s success in examinations. Schools have been more liable to reform the courses which are unrelated to student examination results. Bans against after-school training schools have not been enforced (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). *Quality education* has turned out to be ‘‘said to be important, secondary in deed and put aside when busy’’ (Pang, 2004, p. 3). The examination-oriented system is unchanged even though inspirational education reforms were implemented at some schools (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Examinations remain the sorting mechanism and benchmark by which students, teachers and education are evaluated.

As one of the main obstacles of *quality education*, examination-oriented education has been widely criticized across Chinese society for its flaws. “The educational and funding structure is elitist; teaching is geared to the examinations; teachers focus on academically promising students and ignore others; rote learning dominates classroom teaching and students are weighed down by excessive homework and examination pressure” (Thogerson, 2000, pp. 2–3). Chinese examination-centered education fails to cultivate initiative and responsibility by teacher-centered teaching, rote memorization, cramming, and the disjunction between school education and practical life (Pepper, 2000). Primary education and junior high school education are free of charge (no tuition and other fees). However, both the school and university system are characterized by hierarchy. Publicly funded schools are categorized into prestigious schools/key schools and regular schools. As a kind of state schools, key school is welcomed by most Chinese parents because its high rate in transitioning students
to key schools of the next level of education (Wu, 2014). There are key kindergartens, key primary schools, key secondary schools, and key universities. In addition, according to area, there are state key schools, provincial key schools and municipal key schools. Only those who dominate the “national university entrance examinations” or students with lower results but lots of cash can enter the prestigious universities (Lin, 2007; Ding & Lehrer, 2007). Those prestigious schools and universities are much better resourced than others in many ways, such as more funding, better environment, more highly qualified teachers, superior facilities and highly motivated students.

The aforementioned realities, along with the aspiration for “dragon children”\(^1\) and the One Child Policy, have driven Chinese parents more obsessed with prestigious university. Childrearing has become a focal point of the family’s attention. Investment in education constitutes an exceptionally high portion of private households. It is reported that Chinese urban families spend over 30% of household income on education (Zhongguo qingnian bao, 2012) compared to 2% in the UK (ONS, 2012). After-school training is the second largest item of household expenditure after housing for urban families in China. Media and books have been discussing parenting around entrance to schools or universities. Stories about how Chinese parents bring up their children for success come to the fore. Tiger mom is more inclined to control children’s every aspect strictly with high expectations. Wolf dad advocates corporal punishment in parenting. Sheep mom comparatively is much gentler and only proposes the basic objectives for children’s development in each stage. She gives children more freedom. Eagle dad insists in the education approach that parents should be determined enough to push the children to survive and succeed in an extremely poor and dangerous condition which seems like the eagle parents push their children downward the steep cliff in order to teach them how to fly. Cat dad holds that the education should be conducted differently depending on different individuals and different developmental periods. No matter what kind of parenting style those parents are taking, most of their

\(^1\) ‘Wishing for dragon children’ has been dominating in Chinese pedagogy and parenting philosophy; this means that parents hope their children to succeed and stand out in society.
ultimate goals are to educate their children into prestigious universities in China or abroad (Wu, 2014).
3 Research Significance and Research Questions

There were around 100 million primary school students in China in 2010, which implies that over the next two decades a large number of skilled workers will come from China and a major part of Chinese children will become global labor force in the future (Ministry of Education, 2012; United Workers of the World, 2012). An understanding of the Chinese parents’ perceptions on parenting in contemporary China has the potential to provide a holistic picture of Chinese parenting culture and contemporary Chinese parenting, which is crucial for future discussion.

At the same time, the Chinese government and society attach an increasing importance to children’s psychological and physical wellbeing. However, the overemphasis on examinations and competition may affect children’s wellbeing, development, and their rights negatively. It is therefore expected that this study will bring children’s daily life, educational experience and psychological wellbeing to light. At the same time, educators and parents may find this study meaningful as it may help them to make interventions and strategies for effective parenting.

In this narrative study, I will explore contemporary Chinese parents’ perceptions on parenting and their parenting experiences. I will answer the following questions drawing upon Confucianism and western parenting literature:

1. How do parents describe their children’s childhood and education in contemporary China?
2. How do Chinese parents perceive parenting in contemporary China with regard to their children’s education?
3. What are parents’ expectations of their children’s education and future prospects?
4 Theoretical Background

In this chapter, the theoretical basis of the present study is discussed. The review of this literature starts from the introduction of Confucianism, illustrating four of the developmental goals of education within the hierarchical education system. The second section of this chapter continues with the analysis on Chinese parenting styles related to Confucianism and western theories. As the western parenting plays a leading role, it is necessary to go through the related findings in western studies. The review is finished with a description of Chinese parents’ expectations on children’s education.

The word “parenting” derives from the Latin verb parere-, which means to bring forth, develop or educate (My Etymology, 2008). ‘Parenting’ is a comparatively new word which became salient in the 1950s. It has been conceptualized in many different ways among scholars. It can be a skill, an activity or a process over one’s life time. According to Smith (2013), parenting is “an assumed responsibility for the emotional, social, and physical growth and development of a child” (p. 1959). Nowadays, parenting is more than childrearing or the care activities related to traditional parental roles, parental resources, and relationships. Rather, it requires a set of specific skills and demands of reflexivity and individual identity work (Faircloth, Hoffman & Layne, 2013). In the contemporary context, parenting escalated into a source of or a solution to many social problems. The way people ‘parent’ implies their conceptions of self, kinship and political views (Faircloth at el, 2013). In Brook’s opinion (2012), parenting is a process where parents nourish, protect and guide their children to maturity. Two of the responsibilities parents have for their children are the provision of intellectual development and moral education, and the ongoing attachment and relationship with their children (Brook, 2012.) For instance, parents select or create positive environments ensuring good schools or education for their children; parents teach their children knowledge and learning ability.
In most of the previous literature in China, parenting is considered as activities with regard to parents’ guidance, cultivation and management and the like. Professor Luo Feng (2005) stated that as society and parenting are evolving over time, the concept of parenting has been expanded. He addressed that parenting is the whole society’s business whose main tasks range from the cultivation of learning ability, living skills and social skills to the psychological and physical wellbeing of family members. Nowadays, parenting is mostly related to the love, help, care and enlightenment among family members going through one’s lifetime rather than a unidirectional education activity from parents to their children (Yu & Lin, 2008).

In this study, parenting refers to activities where parents exert their influence on children’s development in physic, emotion, social ability, morality and intelligence (Faircloth et al., 2013; Brook, 2012). Here I mostly reviewed literature associated with Confucianism, parenting styles, and parents’ expectations.

### 4.1 Confucianism and Education

Confucius laid the foundation of Chinese education in three ways. It affirms the crucial role of moral education in education and the importance of morality education in behavior rather than in the academic level (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). “There were four things which the Master taught, letters, ethics, devotion of soul, and truthfulness.” (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 24; Legge, trans. 1971). He is the first to advocate universal education and lifelong education in China. He said “In teaching there should be no distinction of classes.” (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 38; Legge, trans. 1971). Education should be open to all. Almost everyone can improve themselves through education and effort (Park & Chesla, 2007). Furthermore, education is a serious business which should integrate thinking and learning. “Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous” (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 15; Legge, trans. 1971).

*By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart. Analects of Confucius, Chapter 2 (Legge, trans. 1971)*

The ultimate goal of Confucianism is to cultivate the individual into fully human/gentleman (*junzi*) which is reflected in practicing benevolence based on humanity and harmony (Luo
et al., 2013). Another goal of Confucian education is to help the individual to be scholars who were expected to make contributions to the society and manage the country well. Scholars were well-educated gentlemen at the upper social class who practiced humanity and fulfilled their responsibilities for themselves, their families and the society at large (Yao, 2000). In Confucianism (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 13; Legge, trans. 1971), “The student, having completed his learning, should apply himself to be an officer” which emphasized that education achievement leads to higher social status. Humanism refers to the cultivation of goodness through lifelong education and self-cultivation, which involves practicing the “five core virtues” (wu chang): benevolence (ren), righteousness (yi), wisdom (zhi), loyalty (zhong) and sincerity (xin) (Luo et al., 2013). Specifically, the exploration and cultivation of inner world was the foundation of Confucian education which emphasized the balance between inner world and the external behavior (Yao, 2000). There are seven developmental goals that are fundamental to achieve the five core virtues: knowledge, social norms, filial piety, harmonious relationship, modesty and shame, and self-restraint (Luo, et al., 2013). Here I will focus on the first four goals which are the most related to my main research questions.

**Acquiring knowledge**

*Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and a frequent review? Analects of Confucius, Chaper 1 (Legge, trans. 1971)*

The first step toward the ultimate goal is acquiring knowledge. Confucius highly stressed the essential role of motivation, concentration, diligence and persistence in the learning process (Li, 2005; Yang, 2007; Luo, et al., 2013). He believed that every individual could succeed through hardworking (Starr, 2012). Leaners should be active and motivated. Furthermore, he emphasized that teacher should teach according to the individual difference (Yao, 2000). For instance, Confucius answered differently to the same question posed by different disciples. Chinese parents today still attach great importance to the goal of pursuing knowledge, which is considered as a moral virtue (Li, 2005; Yang, 2007). The importance of the acquisition of knowledge is also reflected in Chinese parents’ emphasis on children’s academic achievement (Luo et al., 2013).

**Social Norms**
Do not look at what is contrary to propriety; do not listen to what is contrary to propriety; do not speak what is contrary to propriety; do not make movement which is contrary to propriety. Analects of Confucius, Chapter 12 (Legge, trans. 1971)

The development of social norms, as the core aspect of propriety, is to display proper behaviors and courtesy particularly at young age (Yim, Lee, & Ebbeck, 2012; Luo, et al., 2013). Proper behaviors and politeness are still fundamental components in contemporary Chinese people’s behavior and thinking.

**Filial Piety**

Although a son may gently remonstrate with parents, when his parents do not follow his advice, he must still show reverence to parents and obey their instructions. Analects of Confucius, 4-18 (Legge, trans. 1971)

To be filial, children are expected to show their obedience and reverence to their parents and the elder, and glorify the family through educational and occupational success (Ho, 1996). “Filial piety is the foundation for them to achieve benevolence towards people in future” (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 15; Legge, trans. 1971). It is believed that only when a person loves his or her own parents can show his or her love to others. When conflicts arise between parents and children, children should comply with parents’ advice out of respect no matter whether the parents’ expectations are wrong or right (Luo et al., 2013). In Confucianism, filial piety was not only a critical virtue for self-cultivation but also an essential virtue of a good citizen and an excellent leader in the society (Terry, 2005). It was found that the value of filial piety in Contemporary China declines due to globalization (Wang, Laidlaw, Power, & Shen, 2010; Wang, 2011), however, filial piety is still an essential part in contemporary Chinese family both in China and abroad (Chen, Bond, & Tang, 2007; Lieber, Nihira, & Mink, 2004; Wang et al., 2010) while the decline occurs more in the behavioral level than attitudinal level (Chen et al., 2007). Even nowadays, rebellion against parents is unacceptable and will be criticized.

**Harmonious Relationship**

Harmony is to be prized. Analects of Confucius, Chapter 1 (Legge, trans. 1971)
The developmental goal of interpersonal harmony is defined as the fulfillment of a set of ethics which include generosity, propriety, integrity, and trustworthiness (Wu et al., 2002). The community atmosphere will be harmonious if the individuals can understand and share particular values and norms within a community, knows their own proper positions in the hierarchical society, and takes responsibility for their positions (Park & Chesla, 2007). It was reported that compared with European American mothers, mothers in Mainland China emphasized more in the collectivistic goals (Cheah & Rubin, 2004). Moreover, Chinese mothers stress the value of harmonious relationship from their earliest interactions with their infants (Luo et al., 2013).

4.2 Confucianism and Hierarchical Educational System

According to Confucianism, intelligence, high standards of ethics, and education were a prerequisite for a leader. In the old Chinese society (770 BC to 1910’s), a person’s social class and success was determined by a person’s education, occupation and moral character, by one’s social status rather than by one’s fortune (Lien, 2006). At that time, Confucius categorized people into scholars (shi), farmers (nong), workers (gong), and businessmen (shang) (Park & Chesla, 2007). Scholars were in the top position in a society and enjoyed the highest level of respect as they were mental workers, making decisions and contributions to the society while workers and businessman belonged to the last two levels (Park & Chesla, 2007). Only those who passed a centralized national examination would be awarded a position in the government as a scholar (officer) (Lien, 2006).

This value of education and social class affects Chinese education, labor market and the daily life of Chinese families. Even in contemporary China, scholars still enjoy a higher social class. The strict examination trajectory has been providing people a clearly structured and hierarchical route to reach the scholar status and become members of the lite group in the society. It seems that the successful educational path has been already constructed for people. Success has been defined as high grades, key schools, and higher diplomas (Huang & Gove, 2012). Therefore, the educational achievement is only related to student’s examination grades, school entrance and diploma. It is believed that educational success can offer people a better life, for instance entering the higher social class, and gaining an ideal job or marriage (Cheon, 2006; Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 2008; Louie, 2004; Lien, 2006). Degrees
and educational attainment are vital determinants of students’ job opportunities. Graduates with Bachelor’s degrees or above, particularly those from elite universities are favored in the selection and recruitment systems (China Education Journal, 2005). This phenomenon stands out along with the economic reforms. It was found that the higher educational attainment the workers got, the less possible it was for them to become laid off and the more opportunities they got employed (Margaret, 2006). Within the framework of Confucianism, economic reform, the more salient social stratification and the One Child Policy, Chinese families set higher standards for their children’s academic success.

4.3 Parenting Styles

The concept of parenting styles refers to “a constellation of parental attitudes towards the child which creates an emotional climate or shapes the emotional relation between parent and child” (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 493). Contemporary research into parenting styles started from Diana Baumrind’s (1966) paper “Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behavior” (Xu, 2007). Baumrind (1971, 1991a) found two dimensions, that is parental responsiveness and parental demandingness in her research. Parental responsiveness was described as "the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children’s special needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991b, p. 62). Parental demandingness referred to "the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts, and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (Baumrind, 1991b, pp. 61-62). Under this conceptualization, Baumrind (1971, 1991a) categorized parenting style into three types: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting:

1. Authoritative parents are characterized by high demandingness and high responsiveness. For instance, they are controlling, demanding but warm, rational and receptive to the children’s communication. They are more likely to set high standards for behavior, enforce the rules firmly and respect for the developmental needs of the children. Besides, they set clear and age-appropriate goals and standards for their children’s development in social ability and behavior.

2. Authoritarian parents are high demanding but low responsive. They are detached and controlling but cold and unresponsive. Authoritarian parents “[value] obedience as a virtue and [favor] punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will.” (Baumrind, 1978, p.
3. Permissive parenting or neglectful parenting is neither controlling nor demanding. Compared with authoritarian parents, they are relatively warm.

Chinese parenting styles first attracted scholars’ interest as the superior academic achievement of Asian-American children had been increasingly recognized (Xu, 2007). In the Chinese culture, investigations on the connection between child functioning and parenting styles have been focused on the academic performance (e.g., Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000) or children’s social development (e.g., Chen, Chang, He, & Liu, 2005; Chen, Zeppulla, et al., 2004) (Xu, 2007). According to Baumrind’s categorization, Chinese parents both in China and abroad, are more controlling but less responsive than are European American parents (N.G, 2014). Chinese parents who were living in American showed more signs to restrict, punish and control their children than European-American mothers and English mothers (Chan & Wyver, 2009).

However, evident showed that adolescents in Hong Kong were more liable to describe their parents as authoritative rather than authoritarian (Chan & Chan, 2007). Another study showed that authoritative parenting was more common than authoritarian and permissive parenting styles in China (Xu, 2007). In addition, ethnic minority style was proposed which is a subset of authoritarian parenting. Ethnic minority parents are usually high demanding and high responsive towards children’s academic needs but low supportive for children’s interests (Huang & Gove, 2015).

Scholars related this peculiar Chinese authoritarian parenting style to filial piety, hierarchy (Ho, 1987) and family harmony (Huang & Gove, 2015). Hierarchy and harmony, as central concepts in Confucianism, are the core values in Asian families (Huang & Gove, 2012). According to Analects of Confucius (Legge, trans. 1971), a harmonious society constitutes harmonious families which are based on filial piety while filial piety is the foundation of individual morality.

The harmony of the family usually depends on considering each individual’s role and responsibilities, parents’ authority, and conformity (Huang & Gove, 2015). Within Confucianism, the hierarchy in a family system is clearly and highly structured. Confucius stated there is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the
father is father, and the son is son (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 11; Legge, trans. 1971). Each person’s position and obligations are clarified (Huang & Gove, 2012). According to Analects of Confucius (Legge, trans. 1971), parents are expected to be capable individuals and good moral models who exercise authority in a wise manner and take care of both seniors and youngsters in the family. Confucius stressed that people holding responsible positions must set a good model of moral uprightness by their own words and deeds to influence and reform others. Moreover, another classic Confucianism book Three-character classic (Wu & Tee, trans. 2015) said if a child is raised but is not taught, it is the parents’ fault. In turn, children who benefit from parents should cultivate filial piety as a morality quality, respecting the parents and taking care of them. Instead of showing rebellions, children usually obey their parents’ expectations and demands (Leung et al, 2010). Parents’ right and responsibility to exert authority over their children is unquestioned by children and adults alike (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985, p. 527).

Filial piety and family harmony shapes the home-based education activities. As the parents are endowed with the authority and responsibility to govern and educate their children in the Confucian culture, permissive parenting style is rare in China. The permissive parenting style will be criticized by the society as irresponsibility. Therefore, as discussed above Asian parents were authoritative in their children’s educational decisions, such as exams, school choices, career planning (Huang & Gove, 2012).

### 4.4 Parents’ Expectations on Education and Future Prospects

Parental expectation refers to how parents judge and predict their children’s future success related to a goal (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). In most research, parental expectation is operationalized by parents’ opinions on the educational degree or grades their children will gain in schools. Occasionally, parental expectation is also discussed from child’s perceptions (e.g., Gill & Reynolds, 1999). In this text, parental expectation refers to parents’ judgement and predictions about their children’s education and future prospects.

Parental expectation has been found to play a crucial role in children’s success. It was found that parents’ expectations toward children’s school achievements affect children’s own expectations towards education and school performance, and early expectations appear to
persist throughout children’s school years (Entwisle et al, 2005). High parental expectations were found to be positively associated with children’s interests in school achievement, scholastic and social resilience, and enthusiasm for higher education (Li, 2001). Additionally, the relation between family background and achievement may be mediated by parents’ academic expectations (Benner & Mistry, 2007). Moreover, researchers have suggested that the home-based communication about school was directly influenced by parental expectations (Singh et al., 1995). Parental expectations are the most salient among many family variables that contribute to children’s school achievement (Li, 2001).

In the last decades, the interrelationship between parents’ expectations and students’ academic outcomes, and the level of parental expectations has been explored within the racial/ethnic variations (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Previous literature on Chinese parental expectations primarily emphasizes the comparisons of Chinese parents’ expectations towards children’s education and its counterparts in the Western world (Li, 2001; Goyette & Xie, 1999), concerning the relations between Chinese children’s academic achievement and parents’ educational expectations to children (Li, 2001). Generally, Chinese parents’ academic expectation were found to be much higher than American parents’. Therefore, Chinese children were demanded to achieve in academic as higher as possible, which might contributes to the excellent academic performance among Asian children in American (Byun, & Park, 2012). Additionally, Asian American parents may place a high utilitarian value on educational attainment because they perceive education as an effective impetus for their children (Xie and Goyette, 1999). Specifically, Chinese parents and students relate success in learning to educational goals (Ho, Peng, & Chan, 2001).

As Harkness and colleagues (2010) defined parental expectations are “culturally derived models, beliefs and theories concerning children, families, and themselves as parents” (p. 65). One cannot fully understand Chinese parents’ expectations without examining the Confucian background. Although families vary in educational ritual, routine, and parenting styles, generally Chinese parents are enthusiastic in their children’s education and academic success (Lien, 2006). In China, most of the family’s daily routes and communication is around education (Lin, & Fu, 1990). On the one hand, educational success may provide a better life. On the other hand, addressed by many studies, the underlying reason for this may be Confucian collectivist ideology (Lu & Shih, 1997). Confucian collectivism advocates that
one should endeavor to prosper one’s family. It is believed that Children’s academic success is not only their aspiration for knowledge but also a subsidiary to a family's achievement, which glorifies the family with fortune, power and reputation (Tao & Hong, 2013). A family’s atmosphere is closely related to children’s academic performance. Chinese children’s failure in school will frustrate, embarrass and agitate their parents (Kim, 2006). Children are supposed to learn new knowledge but also perform well in examinations to gain public approval (Tao & Hong, 2013).

These researchers suggested that values learned in China are fostered and integrated with parents’ expectations for children. Tobin and the colleagues (2009) described that in contemporary China, citizens are expected to be more skilled in social ability, innovation, and adaptation in an international labor market due to the economic reforms and globalization. Hence, it seems that there is an increasing attention to the importance of children’s social-emotional competence in contemporary China (Tobin et al, 2009). Meanwhile, there were worries about that because of the preoccupation on academic performance, parents may overlook the cultivation of moral characters. However, Hu's (1996) report showed a contrary result that moral education was still the first priority in Chinese families.

In conclusion, the way Chinese parents bring up their children is the interwoven of filial piety, hierarchy and the quest for harmony. Considering each individual’s role in a family, parents have the obligation to educate their child well while children are supposed to respect the elders in a family (Huang & Gove, 2015; Leung et al, 2010). Generally, Chinese parents are enthusiastic in their children’s education and academic success (Lien, 2006), which is not only regarded as an approach for knowledge acquirement, personal achievement and better life but also an endeavor to glorify one’s family. Academic success is regarded as family business. Therefore, learning and high grades in examination coexist.

In a Confucian society, with the influx of cultures, values and information from each corner of the world and the competition in the labor market, I am wondering how contemporary Chinese parents construct parenting and perceive their children’s education and future prospects. For instance, how do Chinese parents describe contemporary Chinese education, how do Chinese parents describe children’s childhood; how Chinese parents construct parenting in contemporary China related to parental philosophy, parenting styles, and
parental roles in children’s education; what kinds of qualities and abilities contemporary Chinese parents wish to cultivate when they raise their children, and what parents’ expectations of their children’s education and future prospects are.
5 Research Methodology

The aim of this study is to ascertain how contemporary Chinese parents construct parenting related to Confucianism, Chinese education, parenting styles and parents’ expectations. In order to answer the main research questions “How do parents describe/perceive their children’s childhood and education in contemporary China? How do Chinese parents perceive parenting in contemporary China with regard to their children’s education? What are parents’ expectations of their children’s education and future prospects?” I sent a thematic inquiry to twenty-three parents in four Chinese cities. The methodology used for this study was a narrative thematic approach in the form of a questionnaire.

5.1 Narrative Research

Narrative study nowadays is commonly accepted in almost every field and social science discipline (Riessman, 2008; see also Riessman, 1993). A good narrative analysis intrigues the way we perceive seemingly insignificant daily events, and prompt us to think the meaning behind the accounts (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative study is a way to illuminate the disordered narrative accounts by organizing them with a temporal, logical and coherent order, going through the past, present, and the unexplored experience (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Riessman, 2008). Richardson (1995) indicated that narrative study is the “primary way through which humans organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes” (p. 198). The definition of narrative account usually varies by the discipline. Classically, narrative account is conceptualized as a story with beginning, the middle and ending which can be either oral or written (Linde 2001, Elliot 2005, Coffey & Atkinson 1996). However, no matter what the discipline is, narrative account generally requires temporally and spatially structured events or ideas with a consequential
linking among them (Riessman, 2008). But it can also be organized episodically (Riessman, 2008). According to Georgakopoulou & Goutsos (2000), one of the fundamental distinctions between narrative and non-narrative is that “narrative is regarded as discursively constructing and evaluating experience” (p. 73). The narrative accounts embody the narrator’s preference and interpretation of what happened, his or her subjective insights and attitudes towards his or her narrations (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2000). In this study, a narrative account refers to any written episodes related to Chinese parents’ parenting experiences and their perceptions on parenting and children’s education. Some of the narrations might follow the classical story pattern with beginning, the middle and ending but some might only include the critical narrative element of moral evaluation.

5.2 Data Collection

Narrative comes in a multiple of forms and sizes, ranging from organizational documents, life stories, brief and bounded segments of interview, a brief story in response to a single question, to in-depth conversational interviews, and the like (Jupp, 2006; Riessman, 2008). Drawing upon Satu Apo’s (1995, as cited in Paul, 2011) understanding of thematic writing, in this study, I collected the data with a questionnaire of different themes. Thematic writing, an approach of traditional self-expression, has been usually used in folklore research (Satu, 1995, as cited in Paul, 2011). Through thematic writing, the writing narrators recollect and write about their experiences, aspiring for communication, depicting the lived past, and giving meanings (Satu Apo, 1995, as cited in Paul, 2011). Thematic writing provides a chance to understand certain discourses of different cultures including participants’ main focuses (Paul, 2011).

Answers to the ‘narrative’ questionnaire are expected to be given in sentences or paragraphs instead of single words or short phrases (Polkinghorne, 1988). Apparently, open-ended questions are more inclined than others to provide narrative opportunities (Jupp, 2006). The selection and design of the thematic questionnaire was guided by previous literature and main research questions. At the beginning of this study, I was planning to collect interview data. However, I found the respondents were too busy to participate in an interview. Therefore a questionnaire with open-ended questions was used.
Before data collection a pilot testing was conducted. A Chinese parent, whose child is in Grade 5, was chosen. It was presumed that as a parent with parenting experience she has a more profound understanding of my questions. Respondent’s responses, in turn, guided me to polish the questionnaire questions. Additionally, my supervisor assisted me in the reconstruction of questions. Finally, I specifically focused on three dimensions: (1) Participants’ current life and their own childhood (2) Participants’ own experiences as parents (3) their children’ life and education.

The participants in this study were selected through snowball sampling, which is one of the purposive sampling tools (Yin, 2011). The selection of participants was based on Chinese parents who have children in primary schools and would provide highly relevant and substantial information concerning this study. At the beginning, I contacted my friends who are primary school teachers. I felt that they are easily accessible to contacts with students and parents. Eventually, a total of twenty-three Chinese parents with primary school aged children all participated in the study via emails. In order to elicit detailed and rich responses (particularly stories), respondents were encouraged to portray themselves as much as possible. Participants were provided substantial freedom to write detailed answers related to the themes. At last, rich information was generated. Most of the answers are in sentences or paragraphs. Some of the narrations follow the story pattern with beginning, the middle and ending but some include the critical narrative element of moral evaluation.

Among those families that participated in this study, fourteen mothers are responsible for children’s study and living. Six parents take charge of children together with a clear division in tasks. In the rest three families, most of the time, the grandparents take care of the children both in study and living as parents are busy in work.

All the participants in this study included twenty one mothers and two fathers with one between the ages 20-30, twenty between the ages 31-40 and two between the ages 41-50. The average age was 36, which means the respondents were born around 1980. Five of their children are in Grade 1, one in Grade 2, eleven in Grade 4, two in Grade 3, and three in Grade 6. In order to avoid significant heterogeneity among the participants (Ho, Peng, & Lai, 2002; Tardif & Miao, 2000), the respondents here were all selected from Chinese cities with small difference in population and GDP. Parents were recruited from four urban cities in China with a population ranging from 3.7 million to 7.14 million. Additionally, the GDP of
all four cities are among 1420 hundred million to 4672 hundred million in 2012. In addition, parents who is less educated and earned less may be financially and socially restricted which may hinder their high involvement in children’s education (Fan 2001; Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs 2000). At the same time, it was found that parents’ parents’ attitudes towards their contribution to their children’s schooling and development may differ by their educational background (Green, C.L., J.M.T., K.V., & H.M, 2007). Therefore, all the participants do not differ greatly in educational background, career and personal salary. Table 1 shows the demographic information of these twenty-three parents who provided detailed written narrations on the questionnaire. In order to protect respondents’ privacy, here I gave all the respondents pseudo names.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender &amp; Age</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Child’s Grade</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wang Qinqin</td>
<td>F37</td>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>office clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huang Yanfei</td>
<td>F32</td>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>freelancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Shushen</td>
<td>F40</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liang Huiran</td>
<td>F40</td>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>freelancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Jingshu</td>
<td>F32</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>real estate customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hao Weitong</td>
<td>F40</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Xunmei</td>
<td>F39</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiang Yanwan</td>
<td>F36</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dou Ruyun</td>
<td>F37</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Youran</td>
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<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>urban management officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gou Xiuying</td>
<td>F28</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>freelancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Yixiu</td>
<td>M32</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>freelancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Qiaoqian</td>
<td>F30</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu Peiyu</td>
<td>F36</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhong Jinghao</td>
<td>F38</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>civil servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qu Shunying</td>
<td>F35</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He Linglu</td>
<td>F45</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Wanxi</td>
<td>F37</td>
<td>married</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gao Meiqing</td>
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<td>married</td>
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<td>Zuo Chengyu</td>
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<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>journalist</td>
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<td>Zhou Cailing</td>
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<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Wenyin</td>
<td>F38</td>
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<td>civil servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiao Huwei</td>
<td>F31</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1** Research Participants: Chinese parents with children in primary school (N=23, M=male, F=female)
5.3 Data Analysis

In this study, data were analyzed with a narrative thematic analysis tool, which is useful for theorizing thematic elements among the participants’ narrations. Narrative thematic analysis might be the most intuitive, straightforward and common narrative method. Different from other customary forms of qualitative analysis, the events or ideas of stories in a narrative study are kept as a whole by analyzing from the case instead of being distilled into coding bits and pieces according to thematic categories. (Riessman, 2008). In many category-centered analyses, when the accounts are pooled to general statements and edited out of context, it becomes difficult to preserve individual agency and intention, the sequence and structural features of the accounts, which are fundamental criteria of narrative study (Riessman, 2008; Jupp, 2006). Here, narrative thematic analysis is defined as a theorizing process where investigators identify common thematic elements across all the provided thematic written accounts by keeping the narratives intact. In this process, I will select, organize, translate and compare the narrations, endowing the meanings of accounts for the audience.

Unlike oral data, participants’ accounts here are already organized and packaged in a recognizable form. Based on prior and emergent theory, the purpose of this study and the collected data (Riessman, 2008), the analysis in this study is conducted through two stages. In the first stage, I read through the written data carefully again and again to obtain an overall impression and to understand all the materials as a whole. Because I designed the questionnaire questions according to the main research questions of my study, it is easier for me to understand the whole picture without tenuous selection work. Additionally, based on my pre-understanding, research questions of this study and previous literature, related accounts were analyzed and marked while some superfluous answers were discarded to create grounds to support my arguments (Riessman, 1993). Lastly, the accounts were divided into three main themes: parents’ perceptions on children’s childhood and Chinese education, perceptions on parenting and children’s education, and parents’ expectations. And then I grouped all the related questionnaire questions under each theme. After that I put all the related answers into a whole under every theme.
The primary focus in stage two is the organization of data under each theme. I went over each account under each theme, looking for subthemes. Some of the subthemes are explicit while some of them are latent. Lastly all the answers related to each subtheme were grouped together.

Here is an example of the analysis process:

1. Group all the questionnaire questions under the theme *perceptions on children’s childhood*.

What was your own childhood like? How would you describe it? What is the most impressive part? How would you describe your own child’s childhood? What is similar in relation to your own childhood? What is different in relation to your own childhood? ...

2. Group all the answers related to the above questions into a whole under the theme *perceptions on children’s childhood*.

3. Look over all the accounts under the theme *children’s childhood*. Find out the subthemes and extract written accounts according to each subtheme. Translate the newly-packaged material.

4. Compare the narrations, constructing similarities and differences among different themes and subthemes, and endowing the meanings of accounts.

During the whole analysis, I strove to preserve sequence and richness of accounts, and think beyond the surface of data.

5.4 Ethical Issues

Throughout a qualitative study, the researcher needs to consider multiple ethical issues concerning data collection, data interpretation, and data presentation (Johnson, & Christensen, 2012). In this narrative study, endeavor has been made to mark references for all information and ideas from others. Any information uncited was not intended. According to Mack and his colleagues’ (2005) guidelines on ethical issues in qualitative research, before data collection, all the participants were clearly informed about the objectives of this study via an introductory email. Direct quotes for research use were permitted. In addition, the participants were given enough autonomy to decide whether they participate in or
withdraw from the investigation (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Consistent with Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), in order to protect the participants’ privacy, all the information related to participants’ identities was concealed and pseudo names were used. Considering the validation in this study, efforts have been made to support the theoretical proposes by evidence from the participants’ narrative thematic writings (Riessman, 1993). Moreover, participants’ overall goal and recurrent themes were examined carefully in order to keep the coherence of excerpts. In order to give voice to all the participants, I have attempted to describe their narratives as thick as possible (Geertz, 1973).
6 Findings

This study was designed to examine Chinese parents’ perceptions on parenting. Previous research has highlighted the long-lasting influence of parenting on children’s every developmental aspects, with culture as a vital factor that shapes parents’ values towards parenting, children’s education and future prospects (Holden, 2010; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Parenting in China, with Confucianism as dominant culture, is characterized by moral education, scholar supremacy, filial piety and high parental involvement in education. Because of the last decades’ economic reforms in China, there might be changes in Chinese parenting philosophy, parental expectations and parental behaviors. For future study on Chinese parenting, contemporary Chinese parents’ perceptions on parenting should be adequately addressed. Twenty three copies of written accounts were collected and analyzed in this study. In this chapter, the results of the data will be presented to answer the main research questions, in relation to the themes and emerged subthemes.

6.1 Parents’ Perceptions on Children’s Childhood and Education

All the participants recalled that in the 1980s the living conditions were tougher than the current, however, they had experienced a happy and free childhood without worries and pressure. They had not exhausted their energies to enter a key school, rather, they spent all their after-school time with friends after finishing homework.

The massive enthusiasm to enter a key school first appeared in the late 1980s and was widely accepted in the early 1990s (Wu, 2014). In the early 1980s, a family’s primary goal was to earn a living. Some of the participants’ parents were not frequently involved in education as they were busy supporting the family. However, nowadays, with the influence of economic reforms, the One Child Policy and the aspiration for highly successful children, parents
attach more importance to children’s education. Many parents are eager to send their children to key schools, where the teachers are much more experienced in transitioning students to prestigious schools than the regular ones (Wu, 2014). The key school system has been expanded from the secondary education level and higher education to primary and even pre-school education levels (Wu, 2014). Correspondingly, the tough competition for elite schools has been gradually reflected on children’s study and daily life.

Compared with the participants, their children’s childhood seems totally different. Most participants described their children’s childhood as pathetic and miserable. Because of the heavy study tasks, children do not have their own time to play and do other things, especially for students in Grade 6 and those who are in prestigious schools. Even worse, some participants complained that their children do not have enough time for sleeping. They were worried about that children are undergoing too much pressure from study because they are expected to perform well in all kinds of examinations or get a position in an elite school.

Concerning whether participants’ children enjoy study, eight of them reported that their children regard study as a joyful experience. For instance, Liao Qiaoqin described that her daughter was highly motivated and therefore, she can survive from heavy study and pressure. Participants like Jiao Huiwei wrote that she did not demand too much from her daughter. Other eight parents told me that their children are suffering from study. Ten parents stated that their children need to participate in after-school training at least three times a week, for special talents like dancing and drawing, or academic extracurricular activities. There were also parents who did not send their children to after-school training as their children’s schedules were already tight. He Linglu was expressive about her daughter’s after-school training and competition in entrance examination. She marked that:

My daughter is studying at a prestigious primary school. The competition to enter a top ranking middle school is fierce. Every day, she goes to after-school training around 4:30. She finishes her homework and extracurricular study there. The extracurricular study is usually for improving her skills in examinations, including Chinese, Math, and English. Most of the Math exercises are for Mathematical
Olympiad\(^2\). Many other children of different ages are studying in this kind of center too. After study in the training center, my daughter went back home around 10 o’clock. But she still needs to do more Mathematical Olympiad exercises. Meanwhile, she also has to learn some special talents, such as writing and drawing. Because if you want to enter a prestigious junior middle school, what you need is not only academic outcomes but also certificates of your special skills as the competition is so fierce. For example, some of her classmates have credentials like piano Band 10\(^3\), or have won a prize in a writing competition. We need to compile our certificates when we register for the entrance examination to schools. The more you have the more it is possible to win a position. Therefore my daughter only has half a day for relief on weekends. I want my daughter to enter a prestigious junior middle school. Her every classmate is working hard. If you do not learn in this way, how do you surpass your competitors when you participate in the entrance examination to an elite middle school?

In terms of entrance examination, extracurricular activities are inevitable and other talent qualifications were considered as an absolute advantage. However, parents’ aspiration and students’ demand for elite education has been far more than the number of key school. For participants like He Linglu, extracurricular and special talents are necessities for a prestigious junior middle school. She wanted her daughter to study in a key school which is

\(^2\) The mathematics Olympiad is a type of ‘extracurricular’ activity that aims to promote students’ interest and improve their ability in mathematics. Students participating in the competition are required to complete some challenging and non-routine mathematical operations. The international mathematics Olympiad is held every year. In Mainland China, this competition is commonly organized at city, provincial and national level of different grades. High school students who perform exceptionally well are exempted from the highly competitive national university entrance examinations for entry to universities (Peng et al., 2006). Primary school students who perform exceptionally well are exempted from the highly competitive examinations for entry to elite schools.

\(^3\) Piano Band 1-10. Piano Band 10 is the highest level of piano playing. Nowadays, it is not only a hobby for children but also a way to show their aspired schools that they are qualified besides academic performance.
characterized by well-qualified teachers, positive learning environment, excellent peers who are from rich families, advanced teaching resources and more opportunities to elite university at home or abroad. She was worried about that her daughter would be negatively influenced by peers at a regular or under average school where the kids might not behave so well as a result of loose school discipline.

Gao Meiqing totally agreed with He Linglu. She articulated that:

*Nowadays, those students who are not going to get higher education do not need to worry. But if you want to enter a good university, children not only need to take exams but to participate in various kinds of activities and competitions and to learn special talents. Approximately, for some kids, they can only sleep 5 or 6 hours per day. Those parents place too much expectations and pressure on children.*

In a nutshell, in contemporary China, childhood is characterized by pressure and study. Concerning Chinese education, few parents voiced the positive aspects of it. They agreed that the current education is beneficial for the cultivation of hardiness, resilience, diligence and conscientiousness. Meanwhile, in this kind of education system, basic knowledge is emphasized. Nevertheless, almost all the parents declared their dissatisfaction with the current education system. Examination-centered education system, quality education, labor market and adults’ instrumental orientation towards education have been influencing school teaching and learning, and children’s wellbeing. Huang Yanfei complained that schools and society overemphasize grades, ignoring children’s diversity and many other aspects in education. She recalled her daughter’s daily life and school experience:

*Because the heavy study tasks, our daughter does not have time to do anything else, for example, making friends, helping with the housework, and reading.*

... The teachers do not teach what the kids should learn and know. We don’t think what our daughter learns is useful. Most often, children are taught something impractical and inflexible in a spoon-fed way. Some parents are crazy because they ask their children to do more exercises besides the homework assigned by teachers. However, we don’t ask our daughter to do such a great number of exercises. As a result, our daughter is not familiar with all kinds of exercises. Therefore, in the
teachers’ eyes, a child who is born to be smart is just in the middle level due to her less practice in exercises... The teachers are crazy too. In order to improve the academic performance of the whole class and compete with colleagues, they require the children to do lots of exercises. The more exercises you do the more familiar you are with the examination, and then the better scores you get in the exams. Particularly in the days before examination, there are mountains of papers and exercises. As a parent, I am feeling stressful. Every day, we need to accompany our daughter when she does homework. She is tired. We are tired too.

Some other participants were in the same tune with Huang Yanfei that what children need to learn is too much and impractical, and what they are learning is demanding for basic education. At the same time, they did not think teachers are teaching in a compelling and inspiring way which can stimulate children’s learning interest and motivation. It has been shown that there has been a decline in students’ learning interest and an increase in students’ problematic behaviors both in primary education and secondary education in China because of the preoccupation of academic success (Rong, 2009). For instance, an investigation uncovered that 40% of primary students were demotivated (Chen, 2012). On the one hand, the teaching methods are monotonous and children are spoon-fed which is teacher-centered. In addition, learning methods focus on rote memorization. Most often, children forget what they have learnt in the school after examination. Those are opposed to Confucian philosophy in teaching and learning which advocates individual’s own reflection and diversity. As Confucius stated in Analects of Confucius, learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 15; Legge, trans. 1971).

In addition, Liang Huiran claimed that the educational environment which only emphasizes the outcome is not good for children’s development and results in the loss of many other things in children’s lives. Everything is utilitarian. “How many grades did you get?” has been always the first topic in many Chinese families (Wu, 2014). Gao Meiqing supported Liang Huiran’s opinions. She reflected that:

> The reform of education system has been initiated for many years, however, the education is examination-centered... There is more pressure than motivation. The teachers emphasize competition too much. For example, in my son’s class, one teacher divided the students into groups to get credits. This is very good for students
whose academic performance is above the average while for those whose academic performance is under the average it is huge pressure. That teacher overlooked every little progress the students made. So those students cannot find the confidence. Meanwhile, this kind of teaching method generates hypocrisy. Children just take a perfunctory attitude. In order to get the credits, they play up to the teachers in all kinds of ways.

... Last time, my son came back and told me that he would never participate in English contest anymore. He said that he only gained 89 scores as he did not answer one question well. Then he was criticized by his teacher in the office room that his English was poor. I don’t know what I can say about this. If education is torment for the students, then there must be something wrong.

Obviously, the current examination-driven education system is inhumane and utilitarian, where parents, schools and teachers only see the competition, grades and key schools. Children’s nature, aptitudes, creativity and rights are suppressed. Being deprived of freedom and time for natural development, children are not treated as individual subjects of free thinking. In Wang Yixiu’s opinion, child is more like a product produced in the assembly line. He worried that:

Children nowadays in the school cannot find a sense of existence as an individual. In other words, it is difficult for children to get approval in school if they are not good at academic performance or never attract others by their misbehavior. There is a child in our community who performs very well in school. But he is depressed now and cannot find a sense of existence. His mother told me that there is only study in his life at the moment.

Most participants wanted the best school for their children. As Yu Wenyin said nowadays there are not parents who do not care about elite schools. She said that:

We did not stick to elite school at the beginning. However, in the end we fell into the trap of elite school unconsciously.

Nevertheless, Liu Qiaoqian expressed her disappointment and helpless towards elite school:
Besides grades, money and power talks if a student wants to enter a prestigious school. People throng to apply for the first class universities. For our ordinary people, it is difficult to send our kid to this kind of ideal school.

In the same situation, most participants said in such an education system they can do nothing but get accustomed to the situation. Although most participants showed their dissatisfaction with the current education and expressed worries about their children’s wellbeing, almost no parents can keep themselves away from the elite school dream and stop relating every step to their children’s success consciously or unconsciously. As advocated in Confucianism that education still is the foremost for those participants in this hierarchically framed education system (Huang & Gove, 2012).

For their children’s education, most participants followed the mass blindly without critical thinking. It is obvious that there is a deep contradiction in participants’ consciousness and behavior. They aspired a peaceful environment for their children, however, they are trapped in the competition and the aspiration for a dragon child. In order to develop well-rounded individuals, quality education was put into action since 1985, which emphasizes the balanced development in children’s every area. However, in practice, some policies such as the reduction of students’ workload or the extension of the curriculum are not supported by parents as expected for the fear that these measures will impede their children’s success in examinations. Their children’s failure in school will frustrate, embarrass and agitate their parents. Participants like Wang Yixiu reflected they were anxious about and scared of their children’s failure in examination, which might be regarded as a failure in parenting. Sometimes, they compared their children with other children. Zhou Cailing wrote that it was popular to compare children’s academic performance or family background with their peers, by parents, teachers or children themselves. Meanwhile, participants like Wu Peiyu narrated that she got pressure from the teachers every time if their children did not get an expected grade in an examination.

All the parents claimed that they hope their kids can study in a joyful, child-centered and humane environment rather than being forced to learn for grades. The government has been attempting to apply student-centered teaching approaches into the education system, free teaching contents and methodologies away from traditional rote learning, reduce the importance of examinations and the amount of students’ workload, and revise the
examination content, curriculum, and assessment approaches (Lou, 2011). However, even
the quality education is serving for the examination-centered system now. “The educational
and funding structure is elitist; teaching is geared to the examinations; teachers focus on
academically promising students and ignore others; rote learning dominates classroom
teaching and students are weighed down by excessive homework and examination pressure”
(Thogerson, 2000, pp. 2–3). Three factors may account for these phenomena in Chinese
education. Firstly, within the examination-centered education system, students’ grades are
taken as an indicator of children’s competence, parents’ parenting outcomes, and schools’
quality. The educational hierarchy enlarges the disparity between key schools and regular
schools which is reflected in the unequal distribution of educational resources. In addition,
academic success is a highly valued collectivist ideology advocated by Confucianism, which
is related to family honor. It advocates that one should endeavor to prosper one’s family. It
is believed that Children’s academic success is not only their aspiration for knowledge but
also a subsidiary to a family’s achievement, which glorifies the family with fortune, power
and reputation (Tao & Hong, 2013). Furthermore, the new labor market requires more than
before from children’s talents and other skills.

6.2 Parents’ Perceptions on Parenting and Home-based Learning

For most participants, education is the experience for their children to investigate the nature
of things, figure out their lifelong goals, manage skills for independent life and learn how to
conduct themselves. More or less, Confucianism is still guiding most participants’
educational philosophy. For instance, Liu Qiaoqian stated that:

The primary goal of education is to equip children with knowledge about the world
and the nature of things. Most importantly, education should teach children virtue,
such as the way to distinguish the rightness from the wrong, the ability to get along
well with others and how to show respects to the elder and others.

Coincided with Confucian educational philosophy, for Liu Qiaoqian and some other
participants, education is a process to acquire knowledge, and to learn social norms, such as
filial piety, how to conduct oneself, and to learn how to maintain a harmonious relationship.
Likewise, Wang Wanxi mentioned that when they parent their daughter, they draw the
picture of her life according to “three guiding principles”\(^4\) and “the eight entries”\(^5\) in the *Great Learning*, another classic book from Confucianism, and Confucius “five core virtues” (benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), wisdom (*zhi*), loyalty (*zhong*) and sincerity (*xin*)). *Great Learning* is one of the *Four Books* in Confucianism which represents the Confucius educational philosophy, guiding the lifelong development of individuals. It emphasizes the role of individual in the society and the significance of education, advocating self-cultivation and the investigation on things based on one’s virtue, knowledge, and harmony (Legge, 2009). The individuals should pursue the goal to be well-cultivated and well-educated scholars who practices humanity and fulfills their responsibilities for themselves, their families and the society at large (Yao, 2000). Accordingly, Wang Yixiu attached great importance to the traditional education philosophy. He had a strong attitude towards the increasing focus on individual. He wrote that:

>I think nowadays for many people, education is only the way for their own benefits and their own dreams. Few people can relate education to the contribution to the society. They forget why they learn. In my opinion, we should bear in mind the spirit of Chinese nation which is to learn for a harmonious society and to contribute to the society. Without consideration, some traditional virtues should be passed down, such as filial piety, sincerity, and propriety. I don’t think a person who do not respect the elders and family members can show their respect and love to others.

Liang Huiran expressed the same attitude towards the aim of education. She hoped her sons have a meaningful and happy life and contribute to the society after education. However, different from Confucius understanding on education, some other participants emphasized that education is also a process for children to learn about themselves and learn how to enjoy

\(^4\) Three guiding principles are the manifestation of one’s bright virtue, loving the people, and stopping in perfect goodness (*The Great Learning*; Muller, trans. 2013).

\(^5\) The eight entries are the investigations on things, extension of knowledge, sincerity, correct mind, self-cultivation, harmony clan, and then well-governed country (*The Great Learning*; Muller, trans. 2013). Each entry is the foundation of the latter.
life. For instance, Wang Wanxi narrated her understanding on her daughter’s education. She described that:

We hope my daughter can learn about herself and her interests through education. Most importantly, we hope she knows how to enjoy life. For example, how to love others and how to feel love, what kind of life she likes, what kind of dreams she has and how to fulfill the dreams. Parenting should help children to be the one they want to be.

It seems that along with economic reforms and globalization, individual factors have become the central factors when Chinese people assess their own happiness and life satisfaction (Steele & Lynch, 2013). Meanwhile, democracy and individual’s rights were focused in children’s life (Zou, 2008). This is also reflected in participants’ emphasis on the cultivation of their children’s abilities and the interaction between parents and children. When the participants were asked what kinds of abilities they would like to cultivate, most of them placed great importance upon the cultivation of children’s emotional intelligence, such as social ability, positive attitudes towards life, emotional control and the ability to handle pressure. Participants like Liang Huiran mentioned that they encouraged their children to participate in social activities regularly. Some parents mentioned that they wish their children to be positive and optimistic. For instance, Wang Wanxi narrated that she would like to teach her child how to love others. Qu Shunyaing had been trying to cultivate their daughter into a person who has the ability to create and feel happiness. Besides the realization of children’s rights and the increasing democracy, Gao Meiqing’s emphasis on emotional intelligence was also due to her own experience and the current educational environment. She wrote that:

... I thought that if I was a self-disciplined person, with my intelligence, perhaps I can pass the matriculation examination smoothly and study for bachelor degree. Then my educational experience must be easier. But later I figured it out that if I

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6 EI is defined as ‘the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth’ (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 23).
didn’t play so much in my childhood, then I would miss something spiritual when I deal with life. I don’t think it is good to suppress children in their early life. Nowadays, there is nothing besides academic performance to the children. So I want to cultivate my son’s ability in creating and exploring happiness from daily life and pressure. From this aspect, emotional intelligence is crucial. I think we should respect children as individuals.

For participants like Gao Meiwing, the cultivation of emotional intelligence is not only a Confucian heritage, a way for children to handle pressure from heavy study, but a realization of individual rights and a new reflection on the happiness of life and individual satisfaction. However, some parents consider emotional intelligence in a utilitarian way. For instance, Wang Qinlin narrated that:

*I care about the development of my daughter’s emotional intelligence. There is few differences in children’s intelligence. Usually academic outcomes differ by children’s abilities which are highly related to emotional intelligence. For example, the ability to be highly efficient in classes, the skills to read a lot, and the competence to overcome difficulties. If children are equipped with these abilities, it is impossible for them to be unsuccessful and untalented.*

Her understanding on emotional intelligence is based the utilitarian goals towards her daughter’s success. For many Chinese parents the purpose of the cultivation of special talents and skills was only to enable their children to have advantages in learning and outstripping classmates, and to prepare children with certificates for the key school (Wu, 2014). As most Chinese parents keep their eyes fixed on children’s success (Wu, 2014), it is questioned that children’s moral education will be neglected by parents while the achievement in utilitarian goals are highlighted (Hu, 2010). However, in this study, besides physical and psychological wellbeing, all the participants addressed that the cultivation of a healthy personality and moral qualities should be the primary task of parenting and education. For instance, Zhong Jinghao emphasized that:

*I think one of the most important tasks in parenting is moral education, particularly in a Confucian culture. Virtue is the foundation of every person’s life. It influences a person from many aspects, such as the way you get along with others, your attitudes*
towards the society, and the way you perceive the events happened around the world. My husband and I always try our best to set a good role model for our son in daily life from words to deeds. Besides, we encourage him to read some stories or participate in social activities to learn from stories and peers the basic moral rules. Moral education is the first step to self-cultivation. We hope he be a virtuous, responsible and prosocial man who can make contributions to the society in the future.

Zhong Jinghao believed that individual’s intelligence without virtue is a great danger to the society. She said parents are obligated to set good moral examples for their children. Similarly, participants like Liang Huiran claimed that there is no negotiation in decision about moral education and the formation of good habits. Concerning what kind of moral qualities these participants would like to cultivate, almost all the participants referred Confucianism “five core virtues”, benevolence (ren), righteousness (yi), wisdom (zhi), loyalty (zhong) and sincerity (xin). But some parents perceived morality from a utilitarian way because virtue is the foundation of their children’s success. Zhang Shusheng and Gou Xiuying stressed the significance of virtue for individual success:

'It is fundamental to conduct oneself and be upright. In China, it is emphasized that we should convince others by virtue which is the necessary approach to every success in every field.'

The above written narrations shows that individual success is based on the morality quality. However, in Confucianism, virtue should be the ultimate goal of education no matter people are successful or not. But virtue is one of the criteria to evaluate individual success and social class.

Democracy was also shown in the parents-child relationship and educational decision making in most the participants’ families. Most participants considered that the relationship between them and their children is harmonious even though there are problems in communication sometimes. Regarding to freedom in study, all the respondents realized that parents should encourage and allow their children to arrange the study and time by themselves. Most often, if the respondents arranged their children’s study and time, they would discuss with their children and respect children’s opinions before making the decision.
Particularly most participants asked their children what kind of talent training they would like to attend after school. This is contrary to what Huang and Gove (2012) described about Chinese parenting styles, which demonstrated that Chinese parents usually show high demandingness or control and high responsiveness toward children’s academic needs but low responsiveness towards children’s interest. But for those whose children are in grade 1 and those whose children are weak in self-discipline, the participants arrange most of their study and time.

Almost all the parents realized that communication, respect, empathy, self-development and parents’ emotional control, guidance and companion were the most desirable factors in an ideal parent-child relationship. However, more or less, impatient, authoritarian, and instrumental orientation were still the most referred words concerning all the participants themselves as parents. When I asked the participants what they said often to their children, the most frequent responses were “Everything we do is for your good” “No negotiation, just do this” or “You should do this and don’t do that”. Dou Ruyun reflected on parent-child relation and decision making in her family. She narrated that:

*It is good to have a friend-like parent-kid relationship. But sometimes our behavior was inconsistent with what we thought and planned. It seems like parents always expect and demand too much from children. At the same time, it is very difficult for us to view the world from the children’s perspectives. More often, we are like a leader to our son. We just ordered our son to do something because in our opinion whatever the parents do is always good for their children and thus is always right. Sometimes, I think I hope our son can totally listen to my every word.*

This kind of phenomenon was reported by almost all participants, more or less. Some participants like Dou Ruyun overemphasized filial piety and parents’ authority in their families. Within Confucianism, the hierarchy in a family system is clearly and highly structured. Confucius stated there is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son (Analects of Confucius, Chapter 11; Legge, trans. 1971). Each person’s position and obligations are clarified (Huang & Gove, 2012). Children who benefit from parents should cultivate filial piety as a morality quality, respecting the parents and taking care of them. Instead of being rebellious, children usually obey their parents’ authority, expectations, and demands (Leung et al., 2010). Parents’ right
and responsibility to exert authority over their children is unquestioned by children and adults alike (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985, p. 527). As parents, according to Analects of Confucius (Legge, trans. 1971), they are expected to be capable individuals and good moral models who exercise authority in a wise manner and take care of both seniors and youngsters in the family. It is parents’ responsibility to set a good model of moral uprightness by their own words and deeds to influence the children positively. Moreover, another classic Confucianism book Three-character classic (Wu & Tee, trans. 2015) said if a child is raised but is not taught, it is the parents’ fault.

Correspondingly, Chinese parents were active in home-based education during their children’s early years (Lau, Li, & Rao, 2011). In this study, all the participants recognized the significance for them to be highly involved in their children’s education. They considered that they fully participated in children’s education. For instance, in 2015, the books Wang Qinqin bought about parenting and her daughter’s education were ranked among top 10 in her city, where the population was over 6.43 million in 2012. It is reported that Chinese urban families spend over 30% of household income on education (Zhongguo qingnian bao, 2012) compared to 2% in the UK (ONS, 2012). For instance, Wang Yixiu stressed the significant role parents play in their children’s development. He wrote that:

*Nowadays, parents are more likely to bring up their children following the natural tendency and give their children freedom in making decisions. However, I don’t think this is a good idea. As you know, children are too young to know the world and distinguish the goodness from the evil. If there is not adults’ guidance, it is too dangerous for the young people. I think children should grow up in a democratic and free environment where they are allowed to show their diversity. But the premise is that there should be adults’ help.*

Like Wang Yixiu most participants in this study were aware of their children’s abilities as a learner. They monitored their children’s study and academic performance at school and home. They considered themselves having a close relationship with the schools. Every now and again, they checked their children’s school books and asked questions about their study. Most participants involved in teaching their children’s homework more or less. The parents have regular discussions with their children about matters related to schoolwork and school life.
Apparently, permissive parenting style is rare in China because the highlighted importance and responsibility of parents as an educator and a governor in children’s education. The permissive parenting style will be criticized by the society as irresponsibility. The participants’ involvement in their children’s education cannot be simplified into authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting or ethnic minority parenting.

6.3 Parents’ Expectations of Children’s Future Prospects

Educational attainment and knowledge was always stressed by all the participants as a positional advantage for their children to find a good job in the competitive labor market. Almost all the participants showed their aspiration for sending their children to the university. Eight participants emphasized that their children must obtain university education. Gou Xiuying described that society has been attaching more and more importance to diploma, so it is inevitable for her daughter to finish the university education in the future. In the same vein, Yu Wenyin hoped her daughter can pass the matriculation examination and enter a prestigious university and then get a steady job. She said:

*Nowadays, many parents will plan their children’s education trajectory. For example, what kind of primary schools, secondary schools or universities their children are going to enter. Competition is underlined everywhere. Days ago, one of my friends sent their son to a vocational school although my friend and his wife disagreed with that. Usually we parents are more likely to expect our children to study through high school and then university education, even not a college. Because bachelor degree is the basic requirement in the labor market. The disadvantage of degrees under bachelor is obvious in China. We have been planning our kid’s education and future together with her. According to her current academic performance, we planned what kind of secondary education she will receive. If she can keep such good performance all the way to the entrance examination to the university, I think it is not difficult for her to enter a key university. But we want her to enter the top university among the key universities. Once she has a goal, she has the motivation and direction for study.*
Yu Wenyin’s expectation was a kind of adaptation to the competitive labor market. She believed that university education is the foundation and a competitive edge for her daughter’s success. It is reported that graduates from elite universities and those with Bachelor’s degrees or above will be favored in the labor market (China Education Journal, 2005). Degrees and educational attainment are vital determinants of students’ job opportunities. Under the economic reform policies, the higher the education attainment is the more advantage the individual has in job market, vice versa. For instance, the higher educational attainment the workers got, the less possible it was for them to be laid off and the more opportunities they had for becoming employed (Margaret, 2006). In such a situation, educational certificates play an important role in finding a “good”, steady and meaningful job, which is characterized by good salary and respectable social status. Besides, some participants ascribed the emphasis on university education to their own experiences. It was clear that their own education experience and working experience had significantly affected their expectations towards children’s education attainment. He Linglu said:

*People in our time was eager to change their own destinies by knowledge. In order to get out of the family poverty, I finally entered the university after two times of failure in the matriculation examination. However, that doesn’t mean I can totally control my own life. Sometimes, I thought if I got more grades in the matriculation examination I would have more opportunities. From my own experience, I can understand how important university education is in one’s life. Before and nowadays, it is the only way for us, especially for ordinary people, to take initiative and choose the life we like. I am sure my daughter must get university education to achieve her goals. It is best that she can study in a university abroad in a more open environment and then learn some special talents. I hope our daughter can choose the career and life she likes.*

Apparently, He Linlu stated that grade is crucial for the level of university and the importance of university education in one’s life. Around the 1980s, university education was the most desired way for people to achieve personal goals or drag the family out of poverty. Some participants wanted their children to obtain university education and then can take initiative in future life. They hope their children have the rights and freedom to select the life and career they like.
The aspiration for university education was also associated with the Confucianism beliefs. Zuo Chengyu, a father who was sensitive to his son’s grade and education, described that:

I hope my son can enter the university after secondary education. We would be happy if he can make contributions and gain approval from the society in the future. Since his first Grade, children’s grades were always compared by the teachers, parents and children themselves. Sometimes, when my son didn’t perform well in the examination, the teacher would call us and ask us why my son is inferior to other students. Maybe from that moment, I started to keep eyes on my son’s grades. When he made progress in academic performance I was happy while he failed in exams, I was so stressed and frustrated. Sometimes when I participated in the teacher-parent meeting, I was shamed as other children were praised for high grades while my son’s academic ability was suspected by teachers.

Obviously, Zuo Chengyu’s expectation towards his son originated from the cultural beliefs. He believed that child’s academic performance is not only an individual behavior but also is highly associated with family honor. Therefore when his son cannot get high grades in the examinations he regarded it as “loosing face”. Chinese children’s failure in school will frustrate, embarrass and agitate their parents (Kim, 2006). If children can get university education and get approval from the society, then the whole family will be glorified. In Confucianism, collectivism was advocated which proposed that individual should make efforts to proper one’s family (Lu & Shih, 1997; Miller & Yang, 1997). It is believed that children’s academic performance is not only their aspiration for knowledge but also a subsidiary to a family’s achievement, which glorifies the family with fortune, power and reputation (Tao & Hong, 2013). Therefore, it is common to see that family’s atmosphere is closely related to children’s academic performance. Children are supposed to learn new knowledge but also perform well in examinations to gain public approval (Tao & Hong, 2013).

However, Li Jingshu, Qu Shunying, and Jiao Huiwei said that university education was preferred but not the only approach to success. Li Jingshu, a mother who did not attain Bachelor degree, recalled that:
When I was a junior three student, my study fell vertically from the top to the bottom. Consequently, I hit the bottom. At that time, my father consoled me that “undoubtedly knowledge is very important, and it is a real pity you didn’t succeed in entrance examination to high school, however, this doesn’t matter. University education is not the only way out”. He suggested that it was unnecessary to take the entrance exam to university as the only life route, I could choose secondary vocational school and then study further during work. So I studied nursing in a secondary vocational school. I am happy as my father didn’t bring me too much pressure but helped me out of depression. Therefore, I do not demand too much from my daughter. I think everything is alright if she can try her best.

Contrary to many other participants, Li Jingshu’s parenting style did not fit well into the competitive social circumstance. Although she noticed the importance of university education and she felt anxious about her daughter’s education too, she showed less demandingness in her daughter’s academic performance and future prospects. Because she was brought up in a comparatively open and democratic family where her own parents did not hold high parental expectations.

No matter whether higher education is the only way to success or not, all the participants attached great importance to education and knowledge. All the participants hoped their children can live an independent and joyful life and take initiative in their own hands. They wished their children can do what they want to do and become people who they want to be. Twenty participants had been planning children’s education and future career on the long run or periodically, taking children’s opinions and interests into consideration. Interestingly, their orientation towards children’s career was also influenced by the Confucianism heritage. For instance, Jiang Yanwan expressed her ambition towards a happy life like that:

*I hope my son can work as a top scientist in the future. If you want to be happy, you must enter the highest social level and get approval from the society. Both the highest level of happiness and approval are based on individual abilities. There is no wonder you will perform well in school if you are competent enough. Then prestigious university, wealth, and decent jobs will come naturally. I know it is stressful for children and parents to live in such kind of social circumstance, however, we don’t have other choice. The education system and society are strictly structured. If we are*
not diligent enough and strong enough to tolerate the pressure then absolutely we cannot get a position in a good university. Thus high social class will be just an illusion.

Similar to Confucius’ philosophy in education and social class, Jiang Yanwan interpret education as a way to highest social level which will bring her happiness. In federal China, a person’s social class and success was highly related to a person’s education, occupation and moral character, by one’s social status (Lien, 2006). It is believed that educational success can offer people a better life, for instance entering the higher social class, and gaining an ideal job or marriage (Cheon, 2006; Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 2008; Louie, 2004; Lien, 2006). The strict examination trajectory has been providing people a clearly structured and hierarchical route to reach the scholar status and become members of the elite group in the society. It seems that the successful educational path has been already constructed for people. Additionally, there are also signs of Confucius philosophy in participants’ orientation towards their children’s career. In the federal China, Confucius categorized people into scholars (shi), farmers (nong), workers (gong), and businessmen (shang) (Park & Chesla, 2007). Scholars were in the highest social level in a society and enjoyed the highest level of respect as they were educated mental worker, making decisions and contributions to the society while workers and businessman belonged to the last two levels (Park & Chesla, 2007). As shown in the narrations in this study, even in contemporary China, scholars (well-educated people) still enjoy a higher social class while workers and business are not welcomed by participants. Most participants expected their children to be doctor, technician, engineer, teacher, translator, writer, lawyer, editor, designer, scientist and the like. However, no participants mentioned worker, businessman and vocational education. More than half of participants hoped their children to be successful and get approval from the society. For instance, Wu Peiyu expressed her hope that her son can enter a university and be someone in his field one day. Mother Liang Huiran hoped her sons have meaningful life and become philanthropists. Father Zuo Chengyu often warned his son that if he cannot do well in study, absolutely he will do a cleaning job in the future. All the participants orientated to university education and jobs which are less related to manual labor. As advocated in Confucianism, effort was mentioned by all the participants as the way to achieve personal success.
7 Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore how contemporary Chinese parents construct parenting related to Confucianism, Chinese education, parenting styles and children’s education, and parents’ expectations. My analysis confirms that Confucianism and economic reform has been shaping Chinese parents’ parental philosophy and behaviors.

The main findings indicate that Confucianism and economic reform play a key role in understanding Chinese parents’ parenting practices. First of all, as advocated in Confucianism, Chinese parents regard education as a process where children investigate the nature of things, figure out their lifelong goals and learn how to conduct themselves. Particularly, moral education is still prioritized. Secondly, influenced by Confucianism and the economic reform, scholar and education is still prioritized by the society. On the one hand, in Confucianism, scholar enjoyed the highest status in the society while education was the only way for individual to be a scholar. Scholars made decisions and contributions to the whole society through mental labor rather than manual work. On the other hand, the new market economy challenges Chinese labor force and resulted in a competitive labor market. It is reported that graduates from elite universities and those with Bachelor’s degrees or above will be favored in the labor market (China Education Journal, 2005). Similar to Wang’s (2007) findings, almost all the participants in this study attached great importance to degrees and educational attainment. Although university is not the only way to success, most participants showed their preference to university education or key university. However, the results in this study confirms that in reality, not every parent can take initiative in selecting the ideal educational path for their children. Consistent with the dominant literature, the current Chinese education system and related funding system are highly structured. Similar to what Wu (2014) proposed, children from middle class are more likely to be enrolled in the oversubscribed key schools while children from ordinary families are
inferior in the fierce competition for prestigious school. Within Confucianism, a person’s social class is characterized by a person’s education, occupation and moral character. Coincided with Confucius categorization of social class, even nowadays, businessman and labor work related jobs were still not welcomed by the participants. As shown in the data, almost all the participants hoped their children to be a scientist, teacher, or professional jobs and the like.

Meanwhile, parents prioritize children’s ability to know the nature of things and the social ability which were emphasized in Confucianism. The most intriguing part is that those participants placed great importance upon the cultivation of children’s emotional intelligence, such as positive attitudes towards life, and the ability to create and feel happiness. Consistent with what Steele and Lynch (2013) found that individual factors have become the central factors when Chinese people assess their own happiness and life satisfaction. Meanwhile, democracy and individual’s rights were focused in children’s life (Zou, 2008). This phenomenon is also reflected in the parents-child interaction in this study. As most Chinese parents keep their eyes fixed on children’s success (Wu, 2014), moral education was still prioritized by all the participants. But some participants regarded high emotional intelligence and virtue as a foundation for future success. For many parents the cultivation of special talents and virtue was to enable their children to outstrip classmates, and to prepare children for the key schools (Wu, 2014).

Furthermore, hierarchy and filial piety between parents and children results in parents’ dominant role in parent-child interaction, school selection and plan on future prospect. In accordance with Confucianism, children comply with their parents’ decision is seen as an act to show filial piety. Impatient, authoritarian, and utilitarian were still the most referred words concerning the participants themselves as parents. However, respect for democracy, individual satisfaction and individual rights in parent-child communication and decision making is increasing. It is obvious that all the participants were willing to listen to children and took children’s interest and voice into consideration. Contrary to Huang and Gove’s findings (2015), Chinese parents show high demandingness or control and high responsiveness toward both children’s academic needs and the cultivation of other talents and interest although some of the participants perceived talents as a support for entering key school. The possible reason is the economic reform and globalization which has resulted in
tremendous changes in people’s ideology. Chinese people are more liberal and pro-democratic in the 2000s than they were in 1990s (Wang et al., 2004). The values of children and the protection of children’s rights have been widely accepted in China (Zou, 2008). As filial piety also emphasizes the individual’s role in a family and a society. Children are granted to perform well in academic while parents are obligated to be involved in their children’s education. That might be the reason that most participants in this study were supposed to be active in their children’s education and sometimes showed their authoritarian behaviors in parent-child communication and decision making. All the participants considered that they participated fully in their children’s education. They regarded school education as the basis for the future life or future success. If a child is raised but is not taught, it is the parents’ fault. Correspondingly, Chinese parents were active in home-based education during their children’s early years (Lau, Li, & Rao 2011). Therefore, depending on Chinese parents’ high demanding and responsiveness both on their children’s academic needs and interests, it is difficult to simplify Chinese parenting into authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting and ethnic minority parenting.

Concerning the limitations of this study, the first one is the number of participants selected. Only twenty three parents were involved in this study. Although detailed information was collected by a questionnaire, the results generated from such a limited group cannot provide a comprehensive picture. Furthermore, several variables have been considered in this study including participants’ work background, education background, salary, their children’s grades, and geographical difference, however, other elements should also be taken into consideration, for instance, different schools, parents’ gender, family status, etc., which might also influence parents’ perceptions on parenting.

Another limitation of this research is that the data was collected from parents instead of children. It is also important to state here that, opinions and experiences should also come from children as they are the ones who are experiencing school education and parented. They might have different attitudes towards their parents’ parenting. It appeared that the voices of children are more often than not considered in these studies. In this regard, in order to gain a comprehensive picture of contemporary Chinese parenting, children’s opinions on parenting and their experiences should be relegated.
The study indicates that parents who are democratic are more likely to hold appropriate expectations on their children and support the development of their children’s social ability. Meanwhile, based on participants’ descriptions on the current school education and children’s future prospects, attention should be paid to children’s psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, there should be more studies on the relationship between Chinese parents’ emotional maturity and their children’s development. The findings here will be helpful for schools and parents to design more effective educational strategies, interventions and family-school connections. Additionally, this study will provide foreign educators home and abroad detailed information on Chinese educational culture.

In conclusion, my findings indicated that Confucianism and economic reform has been shaping contemporary Chinese parenting. Hierarchy and filial piety were still found to be essential in Chinese family. Scholar, moral education and aspiration for dragon child still occupied a significant role in parenting. More or less, Chinese parents’ parental behaviors cannot be simplified into authoritarian, authoritative, utilitarian and ethnic minority parenting. Obviously, there was an increasing attention to the cultivation of emotional intelligence and social skills. Lastly, based on participants’ perceptions towards children’s education and childhood, certain attention should be focused on children’s psychological wellbeing.
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Appendix 1: Cover Letter to Respondents

To whom it may concern,

I am studying in Educational Science at School of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Eastern Finland. My supervisor Dr Päivi Siivonen will help me conduct my master thesis. As part of my master's thesis on Chinese Parents’ Perceptions on Parenting: Children’s Education and Future Prospects, I am appealing for your honest responses to the attached questionnaire.

I am interested in Chinese parents’ parental experiences concerning their perceptions on their own childhood, Chinese education, and their children’s education and future prospects. One reason for this qualitative study is that valuable experiences, contributions and perceptions from parents may enlighten educators and future parents. I will be most appreciated if you could answer the following questions as best as you can. Please feel free to respond to any of the questions. Meanwhile, all your responses will be appreciated no matter how long your answers are.

The information provided will only be used for research purposes. I might quote some of your responses in my thesis but your names will not be mentioned. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email (yach@uef.fi) or my mobile phone (+358 46 5715689), or contact my supervisor Dr Päivi Siivonen whose Email is paivi.siivonen@uef.fi.

I am really grateful for your help. I am looking forward to your responses. It will be appreciated if you can send the answers through Email before 13rd October, 2015.

Best regards,

-Ya Chen
Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Respondent’s Information

Your Name: ______________

Age: ______________

Family Situation: intact_____ single-parent_____

Occupation: ______________

Place of Residence: ______________

Which grade is your child in: ____________

Income level of family: A. below 2000RMB  B. 2000-3000RMB  C. 3001-5000RMB  D. 5000-8000RMB  E. Above 8000RMB

Please do not be limited by the space provided below. You can answer on a separate sheet of paper. Thank you.

About Yourself and Your Childhood

First I’d like to ask you about yourself and your own childhood…

1. Would you tell me about yourself and your life? (e.g. How many children do you have? Are you busy in work? Usually who takes care of child’s education?)

2. What was your own childhood like? How would you describe it? What is the most impressive part? Do you think it influences your life? If it does, is it positive or negative? Please describe it in detail. Is there something you would like to have been
different? Could you describe those things? How would you change those things?

3. How would you describe your own parents? How were you brought up? Are there something special or remarkable for you? What kind of relationship did you have with your parents? Is there something you cannot forget?

**About Yourself As a Parent**

**Would you tell me about yourself as a parent …**

1. How would you describe yourself as a parent? What do you think are the most important things in parenting? Why? What is the goal of parenting in your opinion?

2. What would ideal/successful parents be like? What would be their most desirable traits? What about their least desirable traits? What kind of a parent you would like to be? What do you need to do to achieve this goal?

3. During parenting, which aspects would you like to focus related to your child’s life, education and qualities (health, psychological wellbeing, morality or success)? What kinds of qualities and abilities do you wish to cultivate when you are raising your child? Do you reflect on parenting often?

4. Would you please describe your family atmosphere? How would you describe the relationship between yourself and your child? Did something special happened? Are you willing to listen to your child’s ideas?

5. What do you think the most difficult when you communicate with your child? Please describe an ideal parent-kid relationship for you.

6. Do your own experiences and the way you were brought up influence yourself as a parent? If it does, how?

**About Your Child’s/ Children’s Life and Education**

**Then I would like to ask you about your child’s life and education…**

1. How would you describe your own child’s childhood? What is similar in relation to
your own childhood? What is different in relation to your own childhood? In what ways do you think your child’s childhood is better than your own childhood? In what ways do you think your child’s childhood is not as good as yours? Why?

2. If you think about the present, how would you describe your child’s study? What is her/his typical school day like? (go to school, extracurricular after school hours, time spending with parents every day, time for homework, what are you doing when the child is writing assignments, are you satisfied with your child’s study? etc.) How would you evaluate it? What is positive about it? Is there anything you find negative? Would you describe it in more detail? In your opinion, does your child enjoy his/ her study?

3. Do you have plans for your child’s education? Could you please describe it in detail? (For example, do you plan it with child or by yourself, entrance examination, the requirements of the school, occupation in future) What kind of education do you wish for your child? Why do you think it is important to have that kind of education? In your opinion, how does Chinese educational system influence your child’s education? What is positive about it? Why? What is negative about it? Why?

4. How would you define the aim of education? (for money, compulsory education, to manage a skill, to learn knowledge or to be a reasonable people, etc. )

5. How would you describe your own role or your husband’s/ wife’s role in your child’s education and learning? Do you usually arrange study for your child or your child arrange it by themselves through discussion? Do you trust your child that s/ he can plan her/ his study well?

6. What is your expectation for your child? How would you define your child’s success? What kind of people do you want your child to be? What kind of an occupation do you wish for your child? What would be an ideal life for your child? How do you think he/she would achieve this goal (For example, through higher education)?

This is the end of the questionnaire.

THANK YOU!