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Chapter 18: Childhood, Children, and Family Lives in China
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In this chapter we bring into focus those aspects of family lives in China that are concerned with children's family relationships, and the ways in which such issues are part and parcel of the broader institutionalisation of childhood. We draw on theoretical frameworks in the sociology of childhood and childhood studies (e.g. Prout, 2004; Qvortrup, 2000; Smith and Greene, 2014). Since these theoretical perspectives have developed predominantly in Anglophone literature, some researchers have considered their relevance to, and utility for, China and Chinese childhoods (Goh; 2011; Miao, 2013; YY, 2011, 2014, 2014bb; Zheng, 2012a, 2012b; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2016). In engaging with existing theories, and applying them to, Chinese children's family lives, we seek to go beyond any tendency to just 'add in the missing children' to existing discussions (Kesby et al., 2006: 186) and give consideration to a variety of cultural and local contexts that characterise China and illuminate why it is necessary to decentre universalist thinking. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the perspectives the two main authors bring to this chapter inevitably reflect their situatedness in the Minority world context of the UK, and reliance on Anglophone literatures.

Childhood studies is an interdisciplinary field, and the empirical studies we draw upon use a variety of disciplinary theoretical orientations and methodologies. It is important to note that, with regard to psychological research, we focus upon studies of parenting 'values'. There is 'an enormous body of [largely Anglophone] research' on parenting values (Helwig et al., 2014: 1150), some of which itself demonstrates the significance of cultural norms and meanings in moderating any such impact (Gershoff et al., 2010; Helwig et al., 2014). We do not here discuss the important but quite separate issues of how childrearing values and practices impact on children's behaviours and other outcomes, However, while much research on parenting is concerned to evaluate 'best practice' for 'optimal development', our stance here views 'best practice' and 'optimal development' as contextualised by cultural diversity, socioeconomic context, and inevitably underpinned by particular values of what constitutes a 'good life' (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011; Ribbens McCarthy and Gillies, in progress).

Sociological research on the other hand, is often concerned less with parenting 'values' and the practices associated with them, but with the taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings underpinning the everyday family lives of parents and children, often studied through more qualitative and ethnographic methodologies. The focus here is upon the relevance of these everyday meanings and practices of childrearing for the ways in which childhood is understood and thus re/created in children's family lives.

Much existing child-rearing and childhood research is based on Western European and American samples, couched in terms that resonate with the cultural concerns of those countries (Helwig et al., 2014). Henrich et al. (2010) observe that dominant developmental psychological frameworks have frequently been developed using WEIRD samples (people from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic countries), undermining the universal

applicability they claim. It is, therefore, necessary to consider that Chinese researchers who adopt these frameworks might themselves import inapplicable Minority World cultural assumptions into their empirical work on diverse Chinese populations (Goh, 2011). In examining the research literature on childrearing values in Chinese children's family lives, therefore, we seek to keep in mind the need to examine the cultural framing and assumptions of the research evidence - issues that some researchers explicitly consider to greater or lesser degrees. In addition, we learn from Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007: 242) that 'Children are at once developing beings, in possession of agency, and to varying degrees vulnerable. It has been a hallmark of anthropological work to recognize that these attributes manifest themselves in different times and places, and under particular social, political, economic, and moral circumstances and conditions.'

Alongside these considerations about how we theorise and apply concepts of 'children' and 'childhood', for our discussion it is also important to explicate how we are theorising and applying meanings of 'family' and concepts of 'family lives' (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). In the discussion here, we use the term to signify both 'family' as an institutionalised structure, and as a set of everyday practices and emotionally powerful meanings and discourses (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2012). The term 'family lives' in particular invokes the term 'family' as an adjective (Morgan, 2011), to refer to everyday practices and interactions to which people attach particular meanings associated with the term 'family'.

The institutionalisation of 'childhood' in contemporary China

Zeiher (2009: 127) writes that 'Looked upon from a societal viewpoint, childhood shows up as a configuration of social processes, discourses and structures which relate to ways of living as a child at a particular time in a particular society, and which gain a certain permanency by being reproduced in social life.' A focus on the institutionalisation of childhood brings into view broader sweeps of history, power dynamics, cultural patterns and social and political structures, although it is also vitally important to recognise that institutions – and indeed, cultures and social structures - are also re/created through everyday interactions and relationships. In this section we seek to outline some broader parameters shaping the institutionalisation of childhood in contemporary China in ways that implicate children's family lives, including features of Chinese internal politics and history, and issues that involve international processes and aspects of globalisation.

Family has a very long history in terms of its centrality for social and political life in China, which in turn has key implications for childhood and children's lives, deeply embedded as they are in collective family structures. But, although the centrality of family was actively overturned for a period during the twentieth century under State socialism, this has since been reversed, with the dismantling of social protection measures (Goh, 2011; Rose, 2011), and moves towards a more market based economy that began in 1978. Yet in recent years, there have been major changes in family structure (Feng, Poston, and Xia, this volume).

Under Maoist policies of collectivization in the mid-twentieth century there were concerted moves to shift traditional loyalties away from the family towards the People's Republic of China and the Communist Party, and radically to undermine generational hierarchies. Nevertheless, China was a deeply segmented society with people categorised on the basis of parental history (Leung and Xu, 2015). A key aspect of this was the 1958 establishment of the *hukou* system of household registration, which depended on family of origin, and while this system has been changing in recent years, children's entitlement to benefits, medical care or education still largely depends on their family hukou rather than any individual rights (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2016).

Since 1978, major social policy changes - including the removal of commune and work based pensions, health care, and employment protection systems - have reinvigorated the crucial importance of generational and family ties for security and protection across the life course, including for health care and elder care (Goh, 2011, and see Feng Zhanglian, this volume). Such dependence on family ties has become all the more important in China due to rural deprivation, largescale migration from rural to urban areas, growing urban poverty, and increases in material inequalities. This has major significance for children's lives, as older generations look to them for their future prosperity and security. In combination with the One Child Policy (see Feng Xiao-Tian, this volume), the effect has been to shape childhood in particular ways that may fit in or conflict with long-standing normative notions of childhood and citizenship. For example, singleton children may have more scope to shape inter-generational power dynamics between family members, but their educational achievements have been foregrounded as the route to their success in adult economic life, which is seen to be crucial to the prosperity of the family as a whole (see Lee Ming-Hsuan, this volume). Such educational pressures have become a key feature of contemporary Chinese childhood, particularly in urban contexts (Fong, 2004; Goh, 2011; Naftali, 2009, 2014).

The implications of the One Child policy have thus been highly significant for (gendered) understandings of childhood, with indications of a change away from utilitarian or instrumental views of children's value, towards the attitude that children are precious emotional assets (Zheng et al., 2005) - sometimes referred to as 'little emperors' or 'little suns', often referring to boys (Goh, 2011; Goh and Kyczynski, 2009; Naftali, 2009). This may sit uneasily alongside the instrumental pressure towards education success. In turn, the policy is associated with major changes in generational family dynamics, with children often seen to be the entire focus for their parents and grandparents' hopes for the family future, generating immense pressures for children in seeking to fulfil such expectations (Fong, 2004). Their experience may thus be one of considerable ambivalence, in which they act as 'lone tacticians' in the complex intergenerational dynamics of 4-2-1 households (Goh, 2011). These trends, however, are more apparent in urban than rural childhoods (Han et al., 2014; Naftali, 2009; Zhang and Fuligni, 2006), and material inequalities in cities may also enable wealthier families – including their broader family and network connections - to obtain advantages to support their children's educational success (Fong, 2004), or indeed, to pay fines for having a second child during the period when the One Child policy was enforced.

Other structural features shaping children's family lives include ethnic differences (Cai, 2013), urbanisation, and urban-rural migration in the context of the hukou system, leading to the major phenomenon of left-behind children (estimated at between ten and 30 million children in total, Wen and Lin 2012, and as high as 38% of rural children in some areas, Leung and Xu 2015), with their parents constituting disadvantaged rural migrants living in cities without hukou registration rights. And while inequalities have long been apparent between different regions, they are also increasingly apparent within urban areas, with associated rises in child poverty. In addition, Leung and Xu (2015: 95) argue that 'policy makers tend to perceive the family as traditionally having primary responsibility for providing care and support to its members and to believe that any government intervention would erode family welfare obligations.'

Furthermore, forces from outside China have also impacted on childhood over the last century and more. This can be seen particularly with historical events such as the Opium War of 1839-42 that brought the influence of Western European countries to bear in the nineteenth century. Over time, this led some in China to seek to employ/apply 'Western' ideas of childhood, including more recently, in a period of contemporary globalisation and international legal and

social policy development (see Dowling, this volume). As Fong (2004) demonstrates in her urban ethnography of children's family lives in China, ideas of 'modernization' as a route out of poverty and towards participation in a prosperous industrialised economy, have taken a powerful hold on many people's expectations, with 'Western' ideas and practices seen as the model by which to achieve this, and educational success the vital key to open the door.

As a structure institutionalised through legal statutes, with regard to compulsory education, removal from paid work, and particular protections, childhood is a much more recent phenomenon in China than in Western Europe. At first glance it may appear that the ways in which 'childhood' in China in recent decades has become socially and legally structured as a specific phase of life are not dissimilar to the ways in which 'childhood' is institutionalised in the West. Closer examination, however, reveals significant linguistic and conceptual differences concerning the meanings of 'child' or *XiaoHai* (小孩, literally meaning 'people who are still small') and 'childhood' or *TongNian'* (童年, literally 'the time of young age'). Furthermore, legislative measures creating chronological categories governing different aspects of children's lives, are historically and culturally embedded (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2016). The meaning and significance of chronological age, for example, has varied markedly, both between China and the UK, and across historical periods within each society.

Indeed, China can be said to have very ancient philosophies of childhood, with philosophers such as Confucius, Mencius, Lao-tse and Xuncius discussing whether children's nature is inherently innocent or evil (Zhao, 1996). Similarly, the history of formal education in China stretches back over millennia, being valued in Confucian philosophy by reference to the central importance of self-cultivation, in terms of moral and character education, without which a person would not become an 'acceptable human being' (Wu, 1996:144; also Chao and Tseng, 2002; Choi et al., 2013). Formal education was significantly shaped by reference to the value of loyalty (Xiao, 1999), and its importance for social advancement through the Imperial bureaucracy. Compulsory education for all children, however, was not introduced until the early twentieth century, and then its implementation was greatly affected by military and political upheavals. By the 1980s, however, new attention was being paid by the State to the nature of childhood, with greater priority given to the registration of all births, and a new emphasis on the importance of compulsory education for all, although the 9-year compulsory education provision was not completely free until 2006.

Children's exclusion from paid work has also developed in ways specific to the Chinese historical and economic context; indeed, rather than paid work impacting on childhood as a result of industrialisation as in Western Europe, childhood in China has been fundamentally shaped by the hardship and poverty of rural lives in a primarily agricultural economy (Fengbo and Punch, 2014). Processes of regulating child labour have tended to focus on paid work, rather than the family based labour that occurs in agricultural areas. It is one of the reasons that rural children are still more likely than urban children to drop out of school, especially after age 14 (Han, 2014*).*

International processes affecting the institutionalisation of childhood in China are apparent through China's involvement in the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which it ratified in 1991 (Naftali, 2009). Thus discourses of children's rights have emerged in legislation in recent decades, as well as in everyday family lives and public media (Binah-Pollack, 2014; Naftali, 2014, 2016). This is despite the widely debated complexities of applying this notion to diverse childhoods around the world (e.g. see Montgomery, 2016; Wells, 2014), Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007: 244) observed that 'the

UNCRC has at its core a universalized and essentialized view of "the child" based on Western assumptions about children's best interests and a single standard of age (18 and under).'

In terms of legislation, the 1992 WeiChengNianRen BaoHuFa (未成年人保护法), 'Non-adults Protection Law', followed quickly upon the UNCRC, but it arguably reflected an uneasy tension between ideas of children's rights as individuals, and older ideas of children as subject to the obligations of filial piety (Keith, 1997: 44). Nevertheless, children's rights and interests were enshrined in law (Naftali, 2009), differentiated by age and gender (Keith, 1997). The Law marked a significant break from older views of children as the property of their parents (Naftali, 2014), and contributed to 'Chinese children's greater capacity to exert control over their bodies and lives and to assert their will *vis-à-vis* power and authority' (Naftali, 2009: 81). While parents are expected to be responsible for many aspects of their children's behaviours, overly harsh disciplining methods amounting to child maltreatment, such as beating and severe scolding, are now legally prohibited. Yet two decades passed before China saw the removal of any child from its parents' guardianship, with the first such case occurring in 2014 (*China Daily*, 2015). The 1992 Act also constituted and protected aspects of children's privacy e.g. no-one else should open their mail, drawing on a rhetoric of 'personal dignity' (Naftali, 2010, 2014). Yet, while this recognised (and simultaneously constituted) 'non-adults' as a particular set of individuals apart from their families, the rhetoric of the legislation also discursively constructed children in terms of the collective future of the nation. As Naftali (2014: 55) argued 'Alongside a humanistic discourse that seeks to liberate and empower the individual child sits a more collectivist strain of thinking which connects the interest of the child to those of the nation.' The tensions in the legislation amounted to 'an extraordinary contradiction' (Keith, 1997: 52), and we return below to their significance for children's family lives.

Traditional notions of filial piety

Filial piety is one of the key ideas shaping family life in China; other core ideas being patrilinearity and gender roles (Hu and Scott, 2014). Gender, and the significance of the father's family, are central but largely taken-for-granted aspects of filial piety itself. The idea of filial piety is a very ancient one in China, and while it may be a concept whose definition remains unclear (Zheng et al., 2005), it carries deep implications for the self and for social life. Furthermore, it has been central to ideas of political as well as family life and kinship, with filial piety being seen as the model for the organisation of society as a whole.

The words that constitute filial piety, termed *xiao jing (孝敬)* or *xiao shun (孝□),* combine different key aspects of the idea, which are mutually dependent. Hu and Scott (2014: 4) wrote that 'First, *xiao* requires children, especially adult children to reciprocate by caring for parents in later life; thus parents are recompensed for their material investment in bringing up children… Second, *jing* or *shun* expresses the nonmaterial aspect of filial piety, which signifies respect for and obedience to the elderly. *Jing* or *shun* obliged children to be thankful to their parents for bringing them up, which in turn constituted the moral imperative to observe *xiao* in their conduct. Furthermore, it was considered an ultimate virtue for children, especially males, to honor their parents by making them proud…'

The Chinese character for Xiào (孝) is composed of two parts, the upper half signifying old, or elder, and the lower half signifying son, which may be understood to represent how the elder is supported by the younger, and/or how the older is oppressing the younger (Ikels, 2004). Alternatively, in view of the way that Chinese was written from the top to the bottom, the character could be taken to signify the continuation of family life from the elder to the younger, ensuring the posterity of the ancestral line. Zhang (2011) suggests that this theme of

responsibility for the future is still emphasised in contemporary China, with a childless life seen as inadequate.

To understand the historical significance of filial piety it is important to consider how far the fate of the individual was bound up with that of the whole patriarchal family and lineage, not just as a child but over the life course, particularly in an agricultural economy. Families were not only the basis for personhood, but also for livelihood and material survival – and this continues to be true in much of present day China. In the absence of a Will, for example, guidelines under the 1985 Inheritance Law provide for any estate to be divided up according to who most effectively fulfilled their obligations to the deceased.

Considerations of self-interest, and sanctions against unfilial behaviour, have also been key reasons for the perennial centrality of filial piety, although instrumental sanctions to ensure its enactment may be much less available to contemporary elders. In traditional China, however, the demonstration of filial behaviour was seen as a 'key indicator of a mature and well-adjusted adult' (Ikels, 2004: 5), and thus of a reliable and trustworthy person. Furthermore, the demonstration of filial piety, or its absence, could bring honour or shame to the whole community, and this may still be the case (Xiuyung, 2014). As the son was expected to show deference and gratitude throughout life to his father for giving him life and sustenance, so subjects were expected to feel towards their Emperor. Within Confucian philosophy, then, the patriarchal family and paternal authority were the basis for an orderly society, with community stability based on (male) authority figures who demonstrate good character, rather than on law or punishment (Chou et al., 2013).

Within this framework, childhood is not something to be idealised and regretted once passed, but a time to learn obedience. Furthermore, parent-child conflict will generally be attributed to a lack of filial piety, and inherent wilfulness, on the part of the child[1], making the responsibility for any conflict lie with the child (Yeh and Bedford, 2004), effectively foregrounding the child's agency (within the constraints of the pre-existing framework of xiào) in relation to the management of potential conflict.

Filial piety is also closely bound up with ideas of character education. Individualistic tendencies are downplayed by contrast with the importance of collectivism and *ren* ((仁)), meaning altruism towards other members of the community – values which are still emphasised in children's programmes and endorsed by contemporary Chinese children (Naftali, 2016).

Filial piety may thus be analysed also in terms of its implications for, and connections with, the experience of selfhood and relationships (Chen et al, 2007). While 'the West' is often characterised as displaying an individualistic culture, Asian societies are often described as collectivist, with obligations such as filial piety central (Ho, 1998, cited by Choi and Han, 2009), Yet, such a dichotomised characterisation arguably fails to appreciate how a collective orientation may be differentiated between and within societies (Fevre, 2016; Ribbens McCarthy, 2012). Choi and Han (2009), for example, draw attention to different formulations for the singular or plural language of self between Chinese and Korean languages, signifying differing constructions of the collective self in family and society. Furthermore, Mamat et al. (2014: 906) argue that Han Chinese exhibit a more relational sense of self, whereas Muslim Uyghurz present a more collective self-construal: 'the relational self-construal emphasizes interpersonal relationships more, whereas the collective self-construal stresses group membership more.'

Writing in a Taiwanese context, Yeh (1997, cited in Yeh and Bedford, 2004) proposed a Dual Filial Piety model, distinguishing between a more reciprocal type (i.e. focused on gratitude for life and sustenance, which is an inalienable obligation on the child), and an older authoritarian type (i.e. focused on obedience, which may be more contingent) - two dimensions which may

occur together or separately. While filial piety may be understood in specific ways in contemporary Taiwan, empirical work (discussed further below) suggests that this distinction may be relevant to contemporary mainland China.

Such differences and dynamism point to the need to develop flexible theoretical models of filial piety that encompass multiple dimensions. Filial piety cannot be taken as a single concept, therefore, since it varies between different Asian societies (Hashimoto, 2004), and is practiced within China in varied and changing ways in differing local circumstances (Ikels, 2004), even as its implications for both personal and social life are deep and extensive, including for the ways in which childhood is understood. It also appears to be practiced in different ways in the growing Chinese diaspora, although evidence suggests the persistence of Chinese values of parenting amongst Chinese migrants (Da and Welch, 2016).

After being central to Chinese culture for thousands of years, reform movements of the 1920s started to question such traditional ideas, and filial piety was actively suppressed during the Cultural Revolution in terms of its emphasis on obedience and loyalty to parents. Currently it is being actively promoted again in some quarters, leading to public debate. Zhou (2015) suggests that, while many Confucian ideas on appropriate childhood continue to be uncontentious, the main debate centres on whether a child should ever question the authority of an elder. Chen et al. (2007: 219) found that aspects of filial piety emphasised by contemporary students included, 'Remembering and worshipping one's deceased parents, minimizing parents' worries, treating one's parents with respectful propriety, and staying close by to serve one's parents. Other manifestations were less observable, such as bringing glory to one's parents, continuing the family line, and obedience…' In their empirical work with college students they found that young women were more likely to be concerned with the emotional aspects of filial piety, while young men were more concerned with its material aspects.

Overall, there is clear evidence of the continuing importance of the concept in general terms, across all regions and educational levels, albeit in complex ways. Drawing on national attitudinal survey data, Hu and Scott found (2014), with regard to filial piety overall, that both women's employment and higher levels of education were associated with more traditional attitudes. As another article from *China Daily* comments: 'Filial piety and family values, among the various and even contradictory moral values in contemporary Chinese society, are still the ones that have the most consensus.' (Wang Y,2014: 9)

Yet, while the contemporary Chinese State continues to support filial piety the emphasis of concern is not so much on the importance of obedience and the creation of descendants, but rather the support of elderly parents. Indeed, it is built into the 1982 Chinese constitution in terms of expectations and obligations for the younger generation to provide support for their parents. This focus is also apparent in published research on filial piety, which is overwhelmingly concentrated on the relevance of the concept with regard to the care of an aging population (see Feng Zhanlian, this volume). Nevertheless, there is research particularly directed towards the continuing significance, or otherwise, of filial piety for relationships between parents and younger children, and it is this work that we turn to next.

Obedience and discipline

Discipline and obedience are concepts that are apparently readily understandable in diverse national contexts, but in China they are also parenting themes resonating with filial piety: 'Filial piety justifies absolute parental authority over children' (Ho, 1996: 155). Hester et al. (2009: 403) argue that 'Within this norm [of filial piety], parents have had the absolute right to discipline and punish children and thereby teach them a lesson.' It is, however, important to be wary of assuming the commensurability of terms such as 'obedience' and 'discipline' across

socio-linguistic communities. Furthermore, in child psychology approaches more broadly, values concerning, and responses to, different forms of discipline are argued to be highly complex (Helwig et al, 2014). In Chinese contexts, punishment may alao include shaming as a form of moral socialization which carries additional dimensions.

It is also important to avoid assuming that obedience can be taken as an indicator of filial piety in any simplistic way, given that the philosophy behind the concept is complex and multi-faceted. Wu (1996) for example, suggests that ancient Chinese theories of child development advocated the avoidance of coercion or physical punishment, while urging the importance of discipline in training children in good habits. Furthermore, there are diverse understandings of particular research concepts and measures (e.g. Xiao, 1999). Research needs to take into account the importance of (specific, local) cultural contexts with regard to both what is taken-for-granted, and what is considered desirable, for the ways in which participants will shape their responses to research investigations (Gershoff et al., 2010; Hester et al., 2009; Rasmussen, 2009). While this is a general issue for all social research, it is likely to be heightened in regard to issues of childrearing that are often highly moralised.

Nevertheless, many writers suggest that obedience and discipline have been central aspects of filial piety and continue to be highly valued. In a study done in the early 1990s, obedience was endorsed as the third most important characteristic of a good child – the first two being moral character and intelligence (Wu, 1996). This is confirmed by more recent survey research (Hu and Scott, 2014). Several ethnographic studies shed light on how obedience may be seen in everyday family interactions in twenty-first century urban Chinese settings. In Fong's (2007) study in a north-eastern coastal city, parents strongly valued obedience, particularly for girls to make good wives and for boys to succeed educationally. Similarly, Goh (2011; Goh and Kyczynski, 2009) found in her study of south-eastern urban families that parents continued to endorse the value that children should respect their elders, including the grandparent generation (as Naftali, 2009, also found when researching middle class Shanghai parents). However, Goh concluded that in practice this belief was undermined because, despite the creation of what she terms 'intergenerational parenting coalitions' (2011: 8), it was fathers who asserted discipline in the house, sometimes including physical punishment that children feared, while some grandparents might express more lenient attitudes towards discipline. More recently, Binah-Pollock (2014) found that pre-school children growing up in Beijing with their university educated, Han-majority parents, were still being trained into obedience by their grandparents[2], who were their primary caretakers, despite the different views of their parents and of much public discourse (discussed further below).

In contemporary Chinese law, physical punishment of children is prohibited in schools but not by parents; parental chastisement is permitted for protection and discipline (Li, 2002, cited by Hester et al., 2009). Yet evidence suggests that physical punishment is common, whether in family or school, and that harsh punishment may be linked to the view that children are part of their parents (Chen, 2006; *China Daily*, 2004; Naftali, 2009). Hester et al. (2009) found that more Chinese undergraduate students (60% of boys and 50% of girls) than British undergraduate students (43% of both boys and girls) reported having been hit as children, almost exclusively by parents rather than other family members. This difference was particularly marked with regard to being hit with an implement such as a stick (over a third in China and approximately ten per cent in Britain). At the same time, the authors point out that a greater social acceptability of physical punishment might have affected students' willingness to report physical punishment in China, since nearly two thirds of the Chinese students (especially male students) agreed that parents should be able to use such punishment and saw it as necessary for the benefit of the child, and a

sign of love (also see Naftali, 2009), while communication was the main alternative that was proposed, especially by female students. In relation to maternal relationships, Zheng et al. (2005) found that among the adolescents they studied, in varying populations across China, 76.5% reported that they always received emotional support from their mothers at difficult times, while only 16.1% reported always being controlled by their mothers, which suggests there may be complex relationships between levels of parental punishment and expectations of obedience on the one hand, and the quality of relationships between young people and their parents/ mothers on the other.

This conclusion is also supported by evidence from Helwig et al. (2014), who studied three samples of children, in urban and rural China and in Canada, comparing the views of 7-14 year olds using a vignette methodology. Their structured questionnaire included aspects of discipline based on induction (reasoning), love withdrawal, and also two different forms of shaming the child (negative social comparisons and 'shared shaming', in which the mother emphasises how the child's behaviour will reflect badly on their family). However, the patterns found in the data were not straightforward, and did not necessarily accord with stereotypes of national or of urban/rural differences. Thus there were no simple stereotypical patterns by which the rural Chinese sample appeared to be more 'traditional', and the urban Chinese sample more 'modern', or the Canadian sample more oriented to reasoning. Overall, Helwig et al. (2014: 1164) conclude that 'The continuing emphasis on compliance found among Chinese participants of various ages and from both urban and rural settings probably reflects the strong cultural orientation of obedience and respect for authority held within Chinese culture (Zhang & Fuligni, 2006). Thus, Chinese participants were more likely to situate or contextualize parental socialization goals within broader cultural values such as obedience (*despite often taking a critical perspective on the practices themselves*)' (emphasis added).

Zhang and Fuligni (2006) also explored differences between urban and rural youth (aged 16-18) in regard to their attitudes to parental authority, paying particular attention to interactions between gender and location, in rural areas and one city in an Eastern region in China. Contrasting somewhat with the work by Helwig et al. discussed above, Zhang and Fuligni found that urban boys showed distinctive patterns, being less likely to endorse a sense of family obligation. However, urban and rural students were alike in their endorsement of parental authority. In their study, Zhang and Fuligni (2006) approached parental authority in complex ways, covering different dimensions of authority across different features of young people's lives. However, as indicated above, educational success holds a key place in many children's family relationships, with particular implications for obedience, discipline and parental authority. We will return to educational issues later, but first we consider aspects of children's independence and autonomy in their family relationships below.

Independence and autonomy

The complexity of comparing patterns across cultures concerning obedience and discipline, on the one hand, and independence on the other, is apparent in Xiao's study (1999) comparing US and urban Chinese data from the 1990-3 World Values Survey. Xiao found that, while Americans and Chinese shared some similar values, it was Americans who ranked obedience more highly than the Chinese, while the Chinese respondents ranked independence more highly than the Americans. In discussing this unexpected finding, Xiao suggests that obedience may be more taken-for-granted by Chinese. Furthermore, for the Chinese independence and obedience are not seen as opposite values, since independence is understood in terms of self-reliance. This is also borne out by finding that independence was rated higher by more educated Americans, which, he suggests, for these respondents demonstrates a view of

independence that associates it with thinking for oneself. By contrast, Chinese education has emphasised moral education as central, which in traditional ideals of self-cultivation concerns loyalty and filial piety, thus entailing a political dimension. Even in the post-1949 era, Xiao argues, loyalty has continued to be prioritised as a feature of education, alongside concerns that education for knowledge might encourage too much independent thinking (also Naftali, 2016).

Although almost a decade earlier, Xiao's (1999) findings presage those of Chen et al (2007) that independence is practiced in different ways in different contexts. In relation to discourses of children's rights as in the UNCRC, however, it is independence in terms of autonomy rather than self-reliance that is a core theme. This opens up difficult issues of how independence, autonomy, and children's rights, are to be understood in diverse cultural and political contexts.

We discussed earlier how new legislation in China since the 1990s has brought children's needs into political focus, part of a broader shift from 'the ethos of sacrificing life for the revolutionary cause [to] an emerging appeal for valuing life' (Zhang, 2011: 1). In relation to children's family relationships, these issues have been discussed by Naftali (2009; 2014; 2016) and Binah-Pollock (2014). Both offer analyses of national policy documents and public media, and additionally Naftali examines policies, educational provisions, and media in Shanghai.

The national legislation itself, particularly the 1992 Law, marked a major shift in state policies towards children, and continues to shape public concerns. According to Naftali (2009; 2014; 2016), in Shanghai, local policy pronouncements took these ideas further and were included in children's school text books. Some children asserted their rights against their parents for privacy, and freedom from physical punishment. However, the 1992 Law did not include all aspects of the rights included in the UNCRC: 'Notably missing from the statute is the idea that children have a mind of their own and should be allowed to express their opinions on matters concerning them—a central tenet of the CRC.' (Naftali, 2009: 84) While some Chinese educationalists might promote the idea that children should become owners of their own learning processes and be able to question their teachers, Naftali did not see much evidence of such practices in Shanghai classrooms.

Naftali did find that some parents gave their children choices about issues in their daily lives, and (very occasionally) consulted them in household decision making. But such choices most certainly did not extend to issues of school work. Furthermore, there was deep ambivalence among some parents about the shift towards such new ideas. The parents limited their endorsement of these discourses, and maintained adherence to 'a re-fashioned ethos of filial piety…fuelled by concerns for family harmony and social stability' (2009: 81).

Binah-Pollock's study points towards canonical shifts in the moral order of parenting, that is not (yet) apparent in children's everyday family lives. She thus evidences strong discourses of 'new' ideas about children as subjects in their own rights in her analysis of popular media, magazines, television programmes and parenting books, suggesting: 'three distinct, yet closely related, topics which the new discourse promotes: (1) children are autonomous human beings who should be treated as their parents' equals; (2) children are unique with distinct psychological characteristics; and (3) children's education is the responsibility of their parents.' (2014: 29) However, Binah-Pollock's work focused on the daily practices of childcare in which grandparents played significant roles. While the public discourses emphasised the need for parents to learn from professional expertise (including about the child's autonomy, emotional development, and inner experience), the grandparents held to a view of the importance of physical development and training children through close bodily control.

Fong (2004, 2007) similarly found parents holding a deep ambivalence towards ideas of their children's independence in her ethnographic study in a North Eastern Chinese city. The parents tended to have complex views, in which obedience and independence were both considered significant alongside the values of excellence, and of sociability (in terms of mutual responsibility). This complexity of ideas led to clashes with their children, who did not understand the subtleties of sociability, and the importance of obedience alongside independent thinking. While the parents saw these various values as strategically important to endorse and adhere to, they were not able to communicate this to their children, to whom their parents' attitudes often seemed inconsistent and contradictory.

Goh (2011, and Goh and Kyczysnki, 2009) operationalised a particular theoretical model of relational autonomy for their study. This model brings children's agency and power to the forefront, as both facilitated and constrained through relationships, which Goh analysed in the context of the Chinese 4-2-1 family, where one child might have enhanced power through being the focus of different adults' hopes and emotional investments.

Given these theoretical and operational starting points, it is not perhaps surprising that Goh and Kyczysnki (2009: 524) conclude, particularly in relation to boys, that: 'The little emperor was found to be an agentic child—a child that has kinship with the assertive Western child, despite distinctive cultural particularities in his expression of agency.' They found that children had strategies for negotiating relationships, deploying one adult relationship against another, and resisting or subverting adult power. While some fathers might exert an almost unchallengeable power over children, even this might be subverted by an inner refusal on the part of the child to endorse his authority. Yet the fathers appeared affectionate at times, expressing a desire to understand their children, pointing towards a cultural context in which affection and the exertion of power can co-exist, although this possibility is not discussed by these Minority world researchers. In these terms, then fathers' position as authority figures might be modified.

Overall, then, these empirical studies generally agree on the presence of new discourses in public media, as well as in some (urban) parents thinking, but they also point to the complexity of how this plays out in children's family lives, and diversity in different locations, as well as between genders. In seeking to understand these complexities, it is important to consider what is at stake in concepts such as autonomy, independence, agency, and rights, and how these may hold particular meanings in specific contexts.

The meanings of such terms are the focus for major theoretical debates across different academic disciplines – but we might briefly indicate here some key dimensions relevant to Chinese children's family lives. Keith (1997) has discussed the notion of 'children's rights' in the People's Republic of China since its first introduction in a white paper in 1991, arguing it reflected an uneasy conflict between a reluctant acceptance of the need for a competitive market, and a desire to pursue the ancient Chinese ideal of harmony (Leung and Xu, 2015). This conflict was apparent through attention to fairness in terms of rights on the one hand, but without challenging the top-down view of organisation and control on the other. Naftali (2009: 103) also suggests that rights in China may not connote the same concept as in the Minority world. 'As noted by several scholars, the CCP and even some political activists in China tend to view 'individual rights' as revocable privileges conferred by the state rather than as 'natural' prerogatives possessed by each individual.' (2009: 103)

Rights may be discussed in conjunction with interests or with obligations (Keith, 1997). Rose (2011) argues that in China, rights link to the notion of 'agency', which has been a key theme in relation to Western European and Anglophone childhood studies in recent decades. Hammersley (2016) points out that (children's) agency is always performed in situations which

provide more or less freedom, and more or less constraint, contingent on specific contexts. 'So, in factual terms, children, like adults, must be seen as active in some respects and to some extent but not in any absolute sense.' Similarly, autonomy must always be understood as contingent and relative, requiring complex formulations, plus consideration of variability within each of these values (Kağitçibaşi, 2005; Rasmussen, 2009).

Such diverse understandings of rights and agency point to different formulations for the independence of children, which itself may be understood in differing ways. The research discussed above, suggests that independence may be found, to varying degrees and in varying contexts in contemporary Chinese children's lives, in terms of such different formulations as:

- who has the power to set limits on making choices, for example in educational study?
- rights to, and expectations of, privacy
- children's scope for free-thinking and creativity, developing individual reasoning and imagination, irrespective of past traditions and learning
- self-reliance and self-care.

Not all these formulations are easily reconcilable with filial piety, in terms of respect for elders and obedience. Education proves to be the crucible in which many of these issues are brought into sharp relief. Expectations of, and pressures towards, educational success for singleton urban children may be intense and unrelenting, such that this is the key area in which autonomy and independence are not to be tolerated, and obedience and discipline are uncompromising (e.g. Fong, 2004, 2007: Goh and Kuczyinski, 2009; Naftali, 2009). Hester et al. (2009: 404) wrote that Chinese newspapers 'report regular instances of both girls and boys being killed by their parents for their apparent lack of educational achievement, and instances where children have killed a parent in retaliation against ongoing pressure and abuse'.

These pressures were recognized by the Chinese government, who sought to ameliorate the situation through the policy of *su zhi jiao yu* (素质教育), meaning Education for Quality, introduced in 1992 to move away from traditional, exam-oriented education and reduce the burden on children, seeking, rather, to improve children's quality, comprehensive growth and creativity. The term, 'su zhi' appeared everywhere, whether in educational policies or schools. But the inexorable logic of such widespread anxiety about educational success meant that the policy failed in the face of the all-pervasive parental pressure on singleton children for academic success.

Developing more complex understandings of children's family lives in China

Filial piety continues to be a crucial feature of Chinese childhood, albeit in highly complex and dynamic ways alongside the introduction of discourses and ideas of childhood that resonate with children's rights. Ho (1996; also Wu, 1996) characterized Chinese childrearing as focused on training for obedience and the acceptance of social obligations, which he contrasted with a lack of emphasis on independence, assertiveness and creativity. Our discussion here, however, suggests that distilling the more contemporary evidence down into a tension between themes of obedience and discipline, versus themes of autonomy and independence, risks obscuring, and maybe even obliterating, further and more nuanced considerations of how childhood in contemporary Chinese families is shaped and understood. Indeed, elsewhere, Ho observed that, 'No assumption should be made that traditionalism is necessarily the opposite of modernism' (1996: 158).[3] To bring such considerations into focus in examining existing research evidence requires us, first, to attend to the clues and anomalies present in the psychological research evidence; and second, to attend to more ethnographic evidence to explore how different ideas of childhood are fundamentally linked to ideas of personhood as relational and rooted in the

social, along with other cultural values such as harmony and social stability, that are historically and culturally embedded in millennia of culture, and encompass differing orientations to the past and the future.

We have shown that the models of childrearing and child development that have been developed in the context of Western European and Anglophone societies may be inapplicable to Chinese contexts, in the sense that they do not easily 'fit' some aspects reported in the studies, and may leave out other key considerations in Chinese children's family lives. 'Training', for example, is a major Chinese approach to promoting children's development (Chao, 1994; Gardner, 1989; He, 2004; Huang and Prochner, 2003) in which parental involvement and support, rather than overt displays of affection, are seen as nurturing through continuous monitoring and guidance. Fung (1999: 203) argues that what US researchers may identify as harsh and authoritarian parenting in China may be better understood as 'training' that takes place in a different context of relationships. Additionally, there is also evidence that 'authoritarian parenting' in the US works differently for different ethnic groups (Phoenix and Husain, 2007)

Additionally, shame in various forms may be seen as an important approach to discipline as a basis for moral socialization or training. Choi and Ho (2009) suggest that this may itself be associated with a more collectivist orientation, in which shame and guilt are used to promote compliance with the norms of the collective, whether family, school, region or country. In this case, the concern is less about having done wrong as an individual, as having lost face as a collective, potentially undermining key values of harmony and stability. Issues around 'shame' and its meanings in Chinese children's family lives and in Anglophone developmental psychology illustrate vividly how a concept used in one context may be applied in another context in ways that substantially reframe it and miss much of its significance.
Helwig et al. observe (2014) that in Anglophone developmental psychology 'shame' is seen negatively, as a form of 'psychological control' and a means of discipline which is said to inflict serious damage to self-esteem, with potentially 'profoundly pathogenic' long term consequences (Barish, 2009: 21). Furthermore, 'shame' is said to undermine 'healthy development' (Soenens and Beyers, 2012: 243). Yet, even where psychological studies seek to be sensitive to cultural diversity, they may still import value judgements through the assumptions built into their basic premises. For example, Barber et al (2011) used a scale to research students' perceptions of their parents' psychological control and concluded that the detrimental effects of such psychological control occurred universally. However, it must be noted that the starting point for this work was a concept of psychological control in terms of 'disrespect for individuality', which was theorised to damage the sense of 'self'.

In such work, then, we see that 'shame' as a form of psychological control is theorised and measured in ways that prioritise the value of individuality and operate with unquestioned assumptions about the nature of 'self' associated with this. In contrast, Helwig et al. (2014: 1,152) claim that in China, 'shame is seen as serving an important moral function in teaching children to pay attention to social norms and requirements and to internalize these perspectives to regulate their behavior.' Furthermore, 'shame' education continues to be strongly advocated by some contemporary Chinese writers as a cornerstone of moral training that may underpin national loyalty (Yan and Wang, 2006; Yu, 2007). Fung showed that shame – 'the quintessential sociomoral emotion' (1999: 18) - was understood as a constructive foundation for the moral training of children. Fung draws on the work of Schneider (1977) to draw a distinction between 'shame as disgrace' and 'shame as discretion', the latter referring to the moral learning of ethical and social rules. Fung claimed that episodes of shaming occurred as a form of learning through everyday interactions: 'From the caregiver's perspective, the purpose was to motivate the children

to take responsibility for their own actions and to improve and strive upward' (1999: 202). Parents used shame to motivate children, often in a playful way, and careful judgements might be made about its use in order to avoid negative consequences. Children themselves were expected to understand this, and not to be too upset by being shamed. It is such contextualised meanings that parenting behaviours convey to children and young people that may shape their subjective experiences (Soenens and Beyers, 2012). Here we see how different theoretical starting points (shame as psychological control damaging to individuality, or shame as key to the moral and ethical learning needed for participation in harmonious social life), and different methodologies (structured measurement scales or ethnographic observations in everyday contexts), might lead to very different findings and conclusions.

In terms of a specific focus on filial piety, there is scope for more theoretical development concerning the concept and its different dimensions and manifestations (Ho, 1996), before we can consider whether or not it is in tension with ideas linked to children's rights, such as (some forms of) autonomy and independence. Zheng et al., 2005, for example, found that the positive value of children related to both collectivistic and individualistic values, with regard to both emotional and familial reasons for valuing children. They showed 'consistently high collectivist orientations and a significant increase in individualistic orientations over generations' (2005: 276).

Overall, we show that in the context of the wider social construction and institutionalization of childhood in contemporary China, filial piety forms an important continuing value in children's family lives which is endorsed by diverse people across diverse locations, including middle class educated parents in Shanghai, but

- its form and dynamics may be changing in some quarters
- it may sometimes be in (deep) tension with other themes and discourses
- its relationship to family practices in regard to children and their parents needs to be considered, with educational issues being key for parental anxieties
- its relationship to other core Chinese values, particularly for harmony and stability, may partly account for its persistence, particularly with regard to inter-generational respect
- these tensions and dynamics in children's family lives may partly reflect, as well as help to constitute, much broader anxieties and tensions about social change and the moral 'crisis' associated with this (Naftali, 2009).

In terms of how far such tensions are entirely new, and how far childrearing patterns and parenting values have changed in mainland China in recent decades, there is some discussion, but insufficient empirical evidence definitively to answer this question. It may be observed that all cultures and societies, particularly in times of change, have to deal with tensions and contradictions of both ideas and practices, which may regularly be brought into focus through dilemmas about what is considered appropriate – for many different types of reasons – for children. But in China, these tensions take a particular shape when they are posed in terms of the ancient Chinese value of filial piety, and the contemporary value of children's rights, which are seen to form a discourse and a basis for political action imported from elsewhere.

The issues deserve a more complex analysis than a simple juxtaposition between ancient Chinese and contemporary 'Western' values and practices. As Naftali (2009) argues, children's rights are not necessarily a simple manifestation of the spread of neo-liberal governmentality, and, we might add, not least in regard to considerations of the forms of personhood at stake. Newer ideas about the possibilities for autonomous individuality may thus need to be understood in the context of the continuing powerful significance of family relationships (Hansen and Pang, 2010). Underpinning much of our discussion and the empirical evidence examined, are questions about how personhood may be embedded in differing understandings of the nature of relationality and

social life, and differing theories about what forms of relationship are desirable between such persons and the societies in which they live. As Ribbens (1994) pointed out in her empirical research in England, much of this gets played out in the nitty gritty of children's family lives. Understanding and researching these requires the ability and imagination to step outside the dominant taken-for-granted assumptions of Anglophone theorizing and empirical work, to consider how children's family lives in China are embedded in diverse and dynamic, local, cultural and deeply historical contexts.

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Endfoots:

[1] Indeed, one of the three typical unfilial acts in traditional understandings was for the younger generation to fail to prevent a parent committing a crime (Zheng at al., 2005)

[2] Note, however, that the presence of grandparents available for childcare will be shaped partly by whether or not the parents have migrated from rural areas, leaving grandparents behind. In her survey of 39 primary schools in Xiamen, on the south east coast of China in 2006, Goh found that only a minority (45%) of households had grandparents who were reported to be actively involved in children's lives (Goh and Kyczynski, 2009). National data shows that 38% of older people live with their children (CHARLS, 2014, cited by Leung and Xu, 2015).

[3] Nevertheless, Ho also argues that filial piety, as an 'encompassing ethic' (1996: 164), may be antithetical to democratization in China.