

Chinese Graduate Students' Perspectives on Home Schooling

Michael H. Romanowski

Center For Teacher Education, Ohio Northern University
Ada OH 45810, m-romanowski@onu.edu

Abstract

Although an established alternative form of American education, the concept of home schooling is just beginning to surface in China. Few Chinese have knowledge of home schooling yet alone consider this form of education. However, graduate students studying in the field of education are aware of this unusual alternative to traditional schooling, one that leads to many questions and discussion. Findings from interviews with twenty-four graduate students (former teachers in Chinese schools) present their understandings, concerns, and perspectives of home schooling. These include implications of a one-child policy, concerns about socialization, changing roles for Chinese women, cultural values, economic issues and lessons Chinese teachers could learn from home schooling. Findings provide a unique Chinese-Marxism perspective on home schooling and discussion addresses the potential of home schooling in the PRC.

TODAY IN THE United States, almost everyone is familiar with home schooling. Most people either know someone who home schools their children or at least are aware of a family that has selected this rapidly increasing alternative to public and private education. Although a growing educational choice in the U.S., the concept of home schooling is just beginning to make its way into China. While few Chinese are familiar with home schooling, many university graduate students studying in the field of education are aware of this growing Western educational alternative and are more than willing to express their understanding and opinions.

With that in mind, how do Chinese former teachers, now graduate students in the field of education, view home schooling? What dilemmas do they see? How do their viewpoints differ from those of Americans? How does the Chinese economic, educational, cultural and political climate shape their view of home schooling? In what follows, findings from a qualitative study conducted at a large Chinese research university are discussed. It presents Chinese graduate students understandings, concerns, and perspectives toward home schooling.

Chinese Education

In order to place this study, the findings and discussion in an appropriate context, a brief history of the relevant aspects of the Chinese Education System is necessary. China has a vast and varied school system with a tumultuous history. One of the most influential factors that have shaped Chinese education is the Cultural Revolution—a major political movement that lasted an entire decade. In 1966, over a decade after the Communist Party gained power in China, abrupt changes were implemented in education. Mao Zedong felt that his party was creating a new and privileged

elite that stalled the socialist revolution (Chen, 2001). Accusing the party of having capitalist tendencies, elitism and a loss of revolutionary fervor (Sautman, 1991), Mao launched the Cultural Revolution that was aimed at rekindling the revolutionary zeal and purifying the party.

The Cultural Revolution abruptly affected the field of education and is still considered one of the most important educational alterations experienced by the Chinese people during the twentieth century (Wan, 2001). During the Cultural Revolution, most of the education ministries were affected and work was at a standstill (Jiaqi and Gao, 1996). China's schools were shut down (they would not reopen until 1970) and universities throughout China were closed for two years (Lin, 1999). In order to remove bourgeois influences, Mao believed that an ideological cleansing was necessary and the purification began with the intellectuals. By definition, intellectuals are those who have completed three or four years of post secondary or higher education. They were doctors, engineers, technicians, teachers, professors, researchers, writers, artists, reporters, and so on (Lin, 1999). Historically as a social group, intellectuals were marginalized from 1949 to 1978 during which period they were condemned and accused of disloyalty to the communist government. They were viewed as bourgeois and were verbally attacked and physically abused. Many were killed while others were forced into the countryside to learn from the working class.

The Cultural Revolutions resulted in terror and paralysis and completely disrupted the education system. The consequences were many. One result was the loss of a rising generation of college and graduate students, academicians and technicians, professionals and teachers. In addition, Chinese citizens who experienced the Cultural Revolution while in their teens and early twenties were denied any type

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of formal education. Furthermore, post-Cultural Revolution policies that stressed education left little room for the millions of people to have productive careers. Instead most were forced to scrape out a living working at menial jobs that pay low wages. Today, these parents want their children to avoid the same fate and are often obsessed with providing the best educational opportunities possible.

In the post-Mao period, China's education policies continued to evolve. The damage suffered to the Chinese educational system took decades to repair and was guided by the principle to bring about educational forms that centered on the advancement of agriculture, industry, national defense, science and technology. However, education had to keep with socialist, communist and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought. The leadership under Deng Xiaoping (ruler of the PRC from the late 1970's to early 1990's) proposed that the sources of economic growth should be modern capital, labor inputs and education rather than appeals to revolutionary zeal (Herschede, 1979). Emphasis was placed on the development of science, technology and intellectual resources to raise the population's education level. Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, intellectuals were declared the major force for building China into a modernized economy. Their social status improved significantly, as well as their living and working conditions.

Although the government has authority over the Chinese education system, the Communist Party played a key role in managing education since 1949. Today, the party continues to monitor the government's implementation of its policies at the local level and within educational institutions. Faithful party members often hold leading management roles and are responsible for leading their school in the direction mandated by party policy.

Today, educational changes are still taking place in China. For instance, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, there were literally no private schools in China. Although government funded public schools dominate, China now has more than 70,000 private schools (China Daily, 2004). In 1998, the Ministry of Education put forward the Action Scheme for Invigorating Education Towards the 21st Century. The first and most important aspect is the EQO (essential-qualities-oriented, called *su yhi jiao zu* in Chinese). Better known as quality education, EQO's goal is to enhance the quality of Chinese citizens, foster students' innovative spirit and practical abilities and to "cultivate successors of the social cause who have lofty ideals, moral integrity, general education and sense of discipline and are all-round developed morally, intellectually, physically and aesthetically" (Xiaoyi, 2002, para.5).

In the meantime, the highly selective public education system has restricted opportunities to acquire high-quality education and fees charged by schools are exceeding parents' ability to pay them, a situation that is extremely serious in rural areas. Given the educational changes and the emphasis on education, the intense competition, limited access to higher education, and the inflexibility of public school curriculum, the demand for educational choice seems to always be an underlying factor in China. However because

of the Chinese-Marxist ideology and the goal to cultivate successors of the social cause coupled with economic concerns, choice is restricted and this hinders the possibility of educational alternatives such as home schooling.

Objectives of This Study

During the 2004-2005 academic year, I was on a sabbatical serving as a visiting professor in the School of Education at a large research university in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The assignment included teaching various courses dealing with American education, providing additional lectures to faculty and students and several additional duties that developed during the two semesters. During the time in China, our four children were home schooled. This sparked curiosity and numerous questions from many Chinese students and their concerns led to this study that raises the question: What do Chinese graduate students studying education think about home schooling? The analysis began by raising the following research questions:

1. How do Chinese doctoral and masters' students view home schooling?
2. What do they see as the advantages and disadvantages?
3. How do their viewpoints differ from those of Americans?
4. What are some of the underlying political and ideological positions that shape their perspectives?
5. Do they perceive home schooling as a future alternative for parents in China?

The Setting

This study describes the perspectives of Chinese graduate students regarding their understandings and opinions of home schooling. These full-time students are former teachers enrolled at a comprehensive research based international university considered to be a leading university in the PRC. Located in central China, the university has over 58,000 resident students of whom approximately 9,000 are postgraduates.

This sample consists of doctoral and master's students in the School of Education. Because of their field of study, their English speaking abilities, and the opportunities to interact with foreign professors and professionals, the respondents are more informed about home schooling than the average Chinese undergraduate student or citizen.

Methods of Investigation

Interviews are valuable tools for qualitative research because they provide opportunities to gather information that could not have been obtained in other ways (Cunningham, 1993). Interviews can be conducted with individuals or focus groups depending upon the particular research. When researchers examine topics that lend themselves to complex discussion and can best be discussed by a small group of people who

know each other, focused groups are utilized (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Kreuger (1998) defines a focus group as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest, in a permissive, non threatening environment" (p. 18). This study used focus group interviewing as the research tool for several reasons. First, the participants were familiar with each other and accustomed to discussing educational concepts and ideas. Second, focus groups create a non-threatening environment because the respondents were already comfortable with each other and the researcher. This is significant since most Chinese students are passive and often reluctant to make direct contributions (Wenzhong & Grove, 1991). Finally, group discussion not only sparks new thinking among participants but also improves the articulation of their arguments in English. The presence of other students provides participants with opportunities to seek aid in clarifying ideas or receive help with particular English words, meanings or translation. The use of focus groups requires that group size is neither too large, that it hampers participation nor so small that it prohibits in-depth coverage of the issue (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990). Groups of six to eight were developed because the participants are likely to engage in lengthy discussions (Kreuger, 1988).

Students enrolled in the class *Current Issues and Problems in American Education* were asked to sign up for a particular time where they would have the chance to discuss, in English, their views on the concept of home schooling. The sample includes twenty-four education students (three doctoral and twenty-one masters). All group interviews were tape recorded. Each interview session began by presenting a brief overview of home schooling, and responding to participants' questions. Although these students are aware of home schooling, they lack specific knowledge, forcing the researcher to answer questions throughout the interviews. An attempt was made to respond objectively by providing factual and accurate information. Questions requiring an opinion were not addressed until the end of the session. Each group participated in a ninety-minute session.

An interview guide was developed. Kreuger (1988) suggests focused interviews include less than ten questions and usually around four to six. The guide questions should be open-ended because these enable respondents to answer from a variety of perspectives, increasing the chance that information will come from the respondent instead of solely being determined by the researcher's questions. With that standard in mind, the following four questions served as an interview guide.

1. What do you think about home schooling?
2. What do you see as some of the advantages of home schooling?
3. What do you see as some of the disadvantages of home schooling?
4. Do you see home schooling as an alternative for families in China?

Based on participants' responses, probing questions were asked to extend the information, allowing for a more

thorough understanding of the participants' perspectives and the reasoning behind their responses. As new topics developed, other focus groups were asked to discuss the issues or to express their viewpoint on this new information. Particular ideas were often checked with individual students to verify for accuracy regarding not only the idea itself but for any translation issues and concerns.

There is no easy way to analyze information produced in conversations among people. Bogdan and Biklen (2002) define qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145). The task is to develop complex meanings of the raw data. First, interviews were transcribed to provide a complete record of the discussions. Second, data analysis was conducted. Qualitative researchers use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990). The main goal of this analysis is to look for trends, themes and patterns that reappear within a single group or among the various focus groups (Kreuger, 1988). The analysis included listening to the taped conversations and conducting a careful examination of transcripts. After close analysis of participants' language and responses, various themes emerged from the data and these were coded and organized. Pertinent examples and quotes were identified and integrated. In addition, field notes were examined and included when appropriate. Finally, the findings were translated into an account that will be read by others. Ideally, the research report will be a rich description that is a tightly woven account that resembles the reality of the participants.

Limitations of this Study

It is important to acknowledge that the findings presented are bound by limitations. First, the sample is restricted to graduate students studying at a highly respected Chinese university. These are former teachers who have achieved great success as students in the current Chinese education system. They are bright, intelligent students, who are the elite that have passed entrance examinations. Upon graduation these students are almost guaranteed leadership positions in various educational institutions throughout the PRC. For these students, the current education system has worked well and they strongly endorse the Chinese educational structure. Nevertheless, the opinions and perspectives of these influential educational leaders are significant because of their future positions in the Chinese education system.

Second, the findings make no claim to generalizability in the traditional sense of the word. Issues related to generalizability have little relevance to the goal of this study, which is designed to examine the perspectives of a particular group of Chinese graduate students studying in the field of education. The findings do have redeeming features given that a partial generalization to other graduate education students at other Chinese universities is probable. However,

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this is not the only interpretation but rather one among many possible understandings.

Finding and Discussion

Although all participants in this study were aware of the concept of home schooling, by no means did they fully understand the process. It was evident that they lacked in-depth knowledge of the specifics of American home schooling such as federal and individual state regulations, university or college admissions, day-to-day schedules and curriculum of home schooled students. At times, their arguments resembled those of Americans while still raising unique and interesting viewpoints. However, their experiences as former teachers and students clearly and uniquely influenced their understanding of home schooling. More important, the findings illustrate Chinese beliefs, ideologies, and the current political, cultural and educational climate in China.

The "Little Emperors" and Home Schooling

When discussing home schooling, participants expressed a concern regarding Chinese parents and their relationships with their children. In 1979, Chinese officials implemented the one-child policy in an attempt to curb the growing population. Those supporting the policy claim that China's population was reduced by 250 million, alleviating the population stress on China who currently possesses one fifth of the world's population.

The one-child policy has led to the development of "the xiao huangdi" or little emperor. These are only children who are pampered, coddled, spoiled and their every need is met by both parents, two sets of grandparents and unprecedented economic prosperity. The little emperors' desires are fulfilled, seldom are they disciplined and they are accustomed to influencing their surroundings. For instance, Chinese children influence their parents 86 percent of the time when it comes to choosing toys and leisure-time activities. In a typical urban Chinese family, children influence purchases 69% of the time, compared to about 40% in the United States (Crowell and Hsieh, 1995). The one-child policy has rendered children as the central focus of the family, producing what is called the "little emperor syndrome."

The "little emperor syndrome" directly influences participants' views toward home schooling. Their concern is that the Chinese parent-child relationship will hinder learning in a home environment because parents are hesitant to challenge, push or provide appropriate discipline for their child. The following participant's quote illustrates this concern.¹

I think in China, parents love their children too much and they may do everything for the children. They may not be very strict to the children and this is not good for the children. This will be much worse if the child is taught at home.

As this individual described this concern, others agreed and further developed the issue. Several participants provided examples from their own personal and teaching experiences to affirm that Chinese parents "pamper" their children and this must be considered when discussing any type of home education. The lengthy discussion regarding Chinese parents and little emperors prompted a question from one participant.

What will you do if your daughter says I don't want to study now or that she does not want to do her home school work . . . maybe she says she is too tired . . . or that she wants to do something else. What do you do? What do American parents do?

The response was that she has a choice. She completes her academic work and then is allowed to engage in other activities or she chooses not to finish her work and reaps the consequences by forfeiting her involvement in activities such as soccer, watching a movie or some other activity she enjoys. The student responded:

So you would make your daughter do the work . . . but you are a teacher and an American. Chinese parents would not do this and the child would do what they want and not complete the school work.

The above comment coupled with agreement voiced by other participants clearly illustrates the reality that Chinese parents might relinquish authority to their child by not disciplining or challenging in the same manner as Chinese teachers would in the schools. Participants feared that this type of parenting coupled with home schooling will hamper the child's education, future and will have negative effects on the social and psychological development of the child. This viewpoint is supported by Chinese educators who suggest that too much care will reduce the child's ability to lead an independent life and prevent them from developing a strong character. The argument is that it is vital for the development of Chinese children to attend school outside the home so the children are not constantly receiving parental pampering and are relieved from being the constant center of attention during the school day.

Not only do Chinese parenting skills hamper home schooling but participants also adhere to a criticism often raised in the United States regarding home schooling and parents. They argued that most Chinese parents are not qualified instructors because they lack the needed pedagogical skills and knowledge to effectively teach their child. Participants' comments reflect this apprehension.

The parent knows nothing about educating children and this will place the child at a disadvantage. Parents don't know what they should teach or how they should teach . . . Professor Michael may be able to teach his children well because he knows very much about education. I think that Chinese parents are not ready to home educate and they might misguide their child.

In China, few people have the ability to teach their children. You must know how to educate children in every stage of learning . . . you must have teaching skills and teaching experience.

Parents are not good at teaching . . . because teachers must have some education so they know how to teach and prepare students.

Participants claimed that Chinese parents do not have the teaching skills, experience, and academic knowledge to be an effective teacher and they would “misguide their child.” For example, many parents lack English-speaking abilities. Chinese education places great value on learning English. Students start studying English as early as kindergarten and the language is tested on the College Entrance Examination. So how will Chinese children learn English if they are home schooled? Furthermore, similar to U. S. critics of home schooling, there was a concern about parents teaching the more advanced or difficult subjects. This is very important in China, since the passing of the College Entrance Examination is vital to an individual’s future.

How can parents teach mathematics, science, languages or other difficult knowledge . . . many Chinese parents do not have the needed schooling to be able to teach these subjects to their child . . . they are uneducated.

The college entrance exam is very difficult. Chinese students need to know a great deal of knowledge. Parents cannot know everything and so they cannot get the child ready for the exam.

The argument that parents are unqualified teachers is often waged against home schooling in the U. S. However, there is a great difference between the countries and the claim is more legitimate in China. The typical American home school parent has attended or graduated from college with about one-half of home educators having earned a bachelor’s degree or higher (Ray, 1999). Unlike in the United States where roughly 66 percent of high school students enroll in college, only a little more than 10 percent of students in China can hope to seek higher education (Guihua, 2002). That statistic leaves a large number of parents with little formal education beyond high school. When considering the education levels of Chinese parents, bear in mind the affects of the Cultural Revolution. Because of the disruption of schools during the Cultural Revolution, some parents have had limited formal education (Lin, 1999). In addition, the lack of quality education in rural China has left many parents with few educational opportunities. This is especially the case for women who most likely will have the dominant role in home education.

If you want to educate the children well, the mother will be well educated but in China that is not very common . . . most women in China are not well educated, especially in the country or poor areas . . . China is very large not just cities.

The formal education of women in China is an important issue when discussing home schooling. The illiteracy rate for women over 15 is 25 percent or 85 million (LeMond, 2002). In China’s countryside, where the rural population accounts for 80 percent of the nation, well-educated women are rare. The argument of unqualified parents coupled with the competitive nature of the Chinese

education system and high-stakes testing renders home schooling as just a nice western educational alternative.

Although participants were convinced that school outside the home was the best avenue for Chinese children, they were quick to point out that the home and parents still must play a vital role in a child’s education. One participant commented that the “parents should learn something from the teacher and the teacher should learn something from the parents.” The argument is that schools should provide help for parents so they, in turn could help their child become successful learners. For example, participants claimed the “parent school” was a sound idea. The parent school, found in some Chinese schools, is where the schools teach parents pedagogical skills so they can better prepare their child for school. The cooperation between teachers and parents is vital but according to the focus groups, the government controlled public schools and private schools must have the main role in educating all Chinese children. Parents should just supplement their child’s education.

Regarding Chinese parents, most focus virtually their whole lives around their child because of their high expectations. If they want their child to do well in the future and live a more comfortable life, they have little alternative but to focus on their child’s education prospects. Lin (1999) points out that

some parents have had only limited formal education, because of the disruption of schools during the Cultural Revolution. Having suffered from the lack of a higher education, they want their children to receive the best education possible. The business owners, although rich, are still looked down upon by the society because of their low educational level. They do not want their children to meet the same fate. Above all, these parents want to give their children the best education possible with the money they have earned (p. 60).

Still if the parents were able to home school, few would risk the consequences such as governmental repercussions or risk that their child would not have the education needed to secure a university spot and eventually enjoy the fruits of a formal education. That is a good job and movement up the social economic ladder.

Socializing and the Little Emperors

One of the common criticisms regarding home schooling is the concern for the socialization of the student. In the United States, critics argue that home schooled students lack the needed opportunities to interact with their peers and fail to learn the greatly required social interaction skills. This lack of social interaction results in a type of social handicapping where students lack the ability to successfully adapt to real-life situations as adults.

From these Chinese graduate students’ perspectives, the issue of socialization is at the forefront of home schooling. Participants pointed out that Chinese educators have argued that parents are pampering their children to the point that the child is not being exposed to the realities of life. A study of

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single-child families in Beijing found that the little emperors were more egocentric, less persistent and less cooperative than children with siblings (Jiao, Guiping & Qicheng, 1986). The participants agreed and maintained that home schooling would worsen the situation. Student comments articulate this position.

They will never learn to cooperate with other students . . . Chinese children are by themselves and never have to share, or work and get along with others.

In Chinese families, there is only one child and they cannot engage in group work. There is little discussion and they can't learn from other students. When children are home schooled, they might not know how to get along and cooperate with others.

The one child must get outside the home . . . home school is not good for the development of the child . . . they will feel alone because they do not interact with other students.

For that reason, school is vital for Chinese one-child families in order for children to gain the needed cooperation skills. Unlike Chinese children, American children have far more opportunities for involvement in community activities, such as organized sports. Chinese students are under immense pressure to study and there is little time to engage in outside activities. This lack of involvement in school, the community and other social activities is a main concern because Chinese schools serve as the primary institution for socializing children.

Regarding socialization, it is important to recognize the distinct difference between American and Chinese views of society and the individual. When describing Chinese values and beliefs, Wenzhong and Grove (1991) point out that

Collectivism is the term used by anthropologists and sociologists to designate one of the basic orientations of Chinese culture. This term should be thought of as located at one end of a continuum; at the other end is one of the basic orientations of U. S. culture, individualism (p. 5).

This Chinese-Marxist worldview is important to understand the difference between American and Chinese perspectives toward home schooling. The difference can best be summed-up by the participants in this study. According to these Chinese students, Americans view the education of their children from an individualistic perspective, with less concern for the welfare of society. These students believe that because of democracy, American parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children. The role of the government is to provide parents with educational opportunities such as public schooling and the freedom to make choices like private schools or home schooling. Although Americans recognize the importance of being a good citizen and contributing to society, that is secondary to the individual aspects of public education. Chinese see this much differently.

I fall in line with wisdom of Marx, "People belong to society." Yes developing the individual is

important but if we think about others and society as a whole, we will feel better.

Based on this Chinese-Marxist viewpoint, home schooling contradicts Marxist ideology because it viewed as an individualistic and even a selfish endeavor. This challenges Chinese norms by placing the individual above the collective group and this would be looked down upon by others. This criticism of home schooling is not limited to China but it is also waged in the U.S. Time magazine raised the issue of citizenship in August 2001 by asking the question; "Is Home Schooling Good for America?" The concern was that home schooling may turn out better students, but does it create better citizens? That is the essence of the participants' concerns. Chinese-Marxism views the group as more important than the individual and home schooling does little to contribute to the group. Thus according to this viewpoint, both society and individual student suffer.

The importance of the group and group study is not just limited to communication and interaction, but there is a need for comparison and classmates are viewed as a resource that helps children grow and develop.

If children cannot compare themselves to others, they will get over confident or maybe under confident.

The student must communicate with other students . . . other students are their resources.

Sometimes education happens in groups, and if a student is alone, there is no discussion and they miss this opportunity to learn and to help teach others.

Certainly, Chinese one-child families coupled with a collective society make the issue of socialization much more real. Unlike the U. S. where there are multiple children in families, more community activities for children, and less emphasis on one's contributions to the society, the Chinese concern with socialization moves beyond social skills and centers on the contributions made and benefits that children receive from being an active and committed member of a collective society.

China's Economy and Social Class

Economics shapes how people understand the world. For these participants, the role economics play in home schooling is rather simple, the average Chinese family could not afford to home school their child.

In Chinese families, parents have to work hard to support the family. If they kept their child at home, then only one parent could work and there would not be enough money.

In America, you can have a job and your wife can stay at home and educate the children. But in China, it is different. The husband and wife must have jobs, they must work . . . many have to work to survive.

Only Chinese families that are able to live on one income would be able to home school and it is very doubtful that the wealthy would choose this alternative form of education. Since higher education is so competitive and vital to a child's future economic and social success, parents

would not jeopardize their child's future by withdrawing from the public education system that serves as the ticket to a successful future. Furthermore because of the changing role of women and the possibility of achieving middle class status, it is unlikely that families would give up one income to participate in a form of education that would isolate their child, bring about criticism from parents and friends and jeopardize the child's future. Instead, additional income could be used to provide additional education, possibly study abroad or any other opportunity that will give their child an advantage over others.

Economic factors also render home schooling impractical. One participant's comment identifies this economic concern.

Parents must ask themselves if they have all the resources to teach their child . . . most people will not have these . . . only very rich people. In America, you might be able to get these things by yourself or there might be other families to help you. . . but not in China.

Resources include access to books and curriculum materials, computers and internet availability, costs for class materials like microscopes for biology and other expensive science materials, and any other additional equipment and resources that schools usually provide. Most Chinese families cannot afford the needed materials and resources to home school and that will hinder their child's education.

Chinese Women and Home Schooling

Today in China, it is rare to find a family where the husband is the lone source of income and the woman remains at home to provide childcare. The typical Chinese family is made up of two wage earners usually because of low wages. On the other hand, it is common in the U. S. to find single salary homes and this is a key factor regarding the ability to home school. Ray (1999) states that in the U.S. the mother serves as the main teacher of children with fathers teaching about 10 percent of the time. With the changing role of women in China, this proves to be problematic for home schooling.

As the Chinese economy continues to grow, Chinese workers find rising salaries and added economic opportunities. With this change, values and beliefs are being altered. Today, Chinese women are economically independent (Shui, 2002) and have more economic and career opportunities than in the past. However, there are implications.

Women are gaining more decision-making power in daily family affairs, according to a national survey on family life conducted by the All-China Women's Federation. The survey found 57 per cent of wives have more say than their husbands in determining daily minor expenditures, while only 13.9 per cent of husbands assume the role of decision maker in daily expenses. But when it comes to bigger items, husbands have the upper hand, with 24.5 per cent having the final say, while only 7 per cent of wives

are the boss in such decisions. The spouses not included in these percentages make their decisions jointly. The results indicate that the trend is for wives and husbands to divide decision making on the basis of their different roles in a family, which is different from the past when the men decided everything (Bao, 2002).

Participants were keenly aware of the changing roles of women and the implications for home schooling. The concern was that if a woman does not work outside the home there would be what they termed as a "loss of the balance in the home." The following quotes illustrate this concern.

If the husband works and wife does not work I think it is very easy to lose a balance in home . . . the husband will have more power.

You work, you earn money but your wife doesn't. Your wife must rely on you. She must obey you. So Chinese women do not want to rely on their husband . . . they want to be able to make decisions in the family so they make money . . . they want to be independent.

Participants argued that an imbalance occurs in the family when the woman remains at home to raise the child. This is problematic because the woman has to rely on her husband for support and she forfeits any role in decision-making. More important, the current situation in China provides more economic and professional opportunities and challenges. It seems that few Chinese women would chose to home school and not take advantage of the many opportunities for women such as, the growing numbers of women filling government positions, the increased level of education for women, and equal protection of women provided by the Chinese constitution. A participant's comment supports this viewpoint.

Most of Chinese women now want to find their positions outside the family or job and earn more money so they can make their family better . . . or so they can survive on their own. Few would give these new opportunities up for home schooling.

In reality, the benefits of working and earning money coupled with previous arguments make it difficult for home schooling to develop in China. As one participant stated, "if I had to choose to teach my child or work and make money, I would work . . . the school will take care of the academics and I will take care of the character and other things they need to learn." With the changes in China, the increased opportunities for women and the competitive education system, few Chinese women would even consider home schooling.

Chinese Teachers Can Learn From Home Schooling

Participants reflected upon their own educational experiences as teachers and students and discussed advantages of home schooling. The rewards were not enough to change participants' views but the positive elements of home schooling were seen as strategies that could be adapted by Chinese teachers to improve education.

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First, participants believed that home schooling provided opportunities to adapt the curriculum to the individual student's interests. In turn, this develops subject matter relevancy and increases motivation to learn. The following quote illustrates this advantage.

The child could learn about what interests them. In Chinese schools, students learn the same curriculum and some children do not like the curriculum but they must learn it.

Participants believed that interest and relevancy were more accessible in home schooling because of the individual curriculum and the limited number of students. Ideally, this should be the situation in Chinese schools. However, teachers must cover particular knowledge to prepare students for the college entrance exam.

Second, home schooling is a nice alternative for both lower level ability and disabled students. The rationale is as follows:

In Chinese primary schools, there is much difference in student abilities and Chinese teachers pay too much attention to the higher abilities . . . even though the lower ones need more attention. So lower ability students would gain from home schooling . . . maybe they need encouragement. However, they should also attend the primary school outside the home.

Students with disabilities will have their needs better met . . . at home they will not have to worry about the bad behavior (being teased) they face from other students.

These comments illustrate the advantages of home schooling regarding one-on-one teacher-student interaction that would benefit "lower ability" students. In addition, the benefits for disabled students such as avoiding ridicule were viewed as positive. More important, since low level and disabled students are unlikely to enroll in the university, their failure to gain a solid preparation for the college entrance exam is viewed as inconsequential.

Discussion

In the U.S., home schooling is no longer considered out of the ordinary. Rather it has become a permanent part of the American education landscape. The democratic government that provides individual rights and freedoms; the ample opportunities for students to seek higher educational opportunities; the adequate income levels that afford educational choice; and the educational levels attained by American women all provide a favorable arena for home schooling to take hold as a legitimate educational option. These factors enable home schooling to take place in the U.S. but they are also the issues that hinder its development in China.

It can be argued that if and when conditions in China resemble those in the U.S., reservations of home schooling might begin to diminish. When examining the conditions in China and the possibility of home schooling, keep in mind

the communist form of government that curtails many of the freedoms and rights Americans enjoy. These freedoms make it possible to even consider home schooling. Also, consider traditional Chinese thinking that greatly differs from a western point of view and how this might influence home schooling. In addition, the concern over home schooling the little emperors is a major issue because with the increase in salaries and access to the middle class lifestyle, the little emperors will continue to be the center of Chinese families.

Nonetheless, China is rapidly changing economically, culturally and some might argue politically. There are significant changes taking place in China that influence education. For instance, Hamrin, and Lail (2003) argue that the middle class is viewed as a threat to the one party system. They cite Western development theory and argue that as people gain access to material comforts, demands for comforts in the social, political and educational arenas will follow. The Communist Party will not easily accept the demands for freedoms, such as laws to protect their property, but the party will have to adapt in order to keep the middle class content. With parental dissatisfaction with the rigid, authoritarian pedagogy of Chinese schools, the middle class will demand access to better education for their children.

Evidence of the Communist Party's adaptation is visible. At one time, non-public education was unavailable in China from 1958 to 1978. Now private education has developed over the past 20 years in China's "changing social, cultural, and economic context of the reform era, catching national and international attention and raising hopes but also many new questions" (Lin, 1999, p. xiii). The development of private education signifies the government's response to the need for high-quality schools.

Still with the rapidly changing Chinese economy and culture, the educational system must continue to adapt. As one participant stated,

as China changes, the public school system is not providing what we students need so parents might choose to teach their children at home . . . I think it (home schooling) might happen one day.

Based on personal experiences teaching and living in the PRC, it is difficult to imagine the changes required for home schooling to become a possibility. For example, the lack of academic freedom alone raises skepticism as to the future of home schooling. The powerful control over education by the powerful Communist Party would need to be reduced for home schooling to become a legitimate educational alternative in the PRC. The bottom line is that the Chinese people and government must be radically transformed. Nevertheless, the changing Chinese culture and economy make the possibility of parents having more choice in their child's education in the future a reality and perhaps with significant time, the gradual acceptance of some form of home schooling.

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Note:

1. It is important to note that the participants' quotes provided have been rewritten to improve readability. These changes have not altered meanings in any way. *