

Motivation, Responsibility and Anxiety: Parenting Dispositions of Chinese Mothers

Karen Guo¹⁾

Deakin University

Abstract

One of the key principles in the ideology which underpins education is the value of children's family experience. Central to this idea is the view of parents as important. Parenting has become a vital dimension in contemporary education. Parenting discourses traditionally focus on such concepts as parenting style, approach, attitude or practice. The main consideration behind these concepts is what parents appear to be doing at a single point of time, referring to parenting per se. This paper takes on the notion of disposition in order to understand urban Chinese mothers' habitual and characteristic ways of child rearing. It presents evidence to show that a group of Chinese mothers had parenting dispositions of motivation, responsibility and anxiety. Data came from a series of conversations between 50 Chinese mothers of preschool children and five early childhood teachers through a synchronous online text chat. In the process of consulting the early childhood teachers, the parents expressed many concerns, questions and views of childrearing and early childhood education, thereby providing evidence about their thinking and behaviour. Drawing on the concept of 'disposition', the study provides insights into the common thinking threads that characterized Chinese parenting and the ways those threads were woven into their disposed approaches to child rearing and early education.

Keywords: disposition, parenting, Chinese, globalization, child rearing

Corresponding author, ¹⁾ karen.guo@deakin.edu.au

Introduction

Parenting is an important discourse in education. This discourse has raised two main issues. First: how do parents implement practice with children? Second: what is behind parents' practice? These two issues seem to have encompassed every facet of parenting: parenting style, approach and belief. One common feature about these facets is that they consider one aspect of parenting. The particular focus of this paper is to explore the dispositions of contemporary Chinese parents. Drawing on the concept of 'disposition', I envision a framework for building an understanding of a group of Chinese parents' sustained and patterned ways of thinking and behaviour. Such a framework would explore the parents' habits and characteristics, emphasize their thinking and mind and offer a more holistic view of parenthood than the other concepts such as parenting belief or style which tends to see either what parents think or what they do (Stein & Breckenridge, 2014). Within the framework of disposition, parenting derives from the combination of a habit of mind and that of behaviour.

Ever since Katz (1993) differentiated disposition from other personal characteristics, such as trait, thought, skill, attitude and habit, and then recombined them into the construct known as "enduring habits of minds" (p.16), research has taken steps to address learning dispositions as essential elements of children's learning. An important reason for this is that disposition is a collection of tendencies and patterns of behaviour and they are "sufficiently important aspects of children's development and education to be among the goals" (p.19). Disposition is considered to reveal sufficient details about repetitive and sustained ways of thinking and behaving. It is therefore a crucial companion to knowledge, skill, practice or values.

As a patterned way of thinking and acting, 'disposition' is also used to understand adults and 'determine' the ideas of personality, intentionality and mind which are relative to 'disposition' (Mills, 2013; Shanks, Robson & Gray, 2012). Thus disposition can be perceived as an essential part of human beings. It indicates not only thinking or acting but also feeling. To say this is not to imply that disposition is only an inner process. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1980), disposition is a response to contexts and it is created through a social process.

One focus of attention in writings on Chinese parenting is parents' beliefs. There has been strong support for the view that Chinese philosophers, particularly Confucius influenced

Chinese parents (Yim, Lee & Ebbeck, 2013). It is believed that regardless of their genetic heritage, all children can be cultivated for a good end. A core idea in the Confucian philosophy is that proper parenting can make a difference to children's lives (Luo, Tamis-LeMonda & Song, 2013). Closely associated with this belief are a cluster of valued attitudes of Chinese parents: "striving to enhance family's status, providing the best learning environment for children, emphasizing effort and practice, belief in persistence to obtain success, and upholding high standards of excellence" (Hau & Ho, 2010, p.190). In practice, parents strive to cultivate children's proper characteristics, such as self-restraint, hardworking and harmonious interpersonal relationship (Li & Wang, 2004).

Parent in Chinese is called as 'JiaZhang', meaning family senior. Parent in this sense is characteristic of importance, respectability and responsibility. In some ways, perhaps, the dimension of responsibility is more significant than parents' status, such as being important and respectable, since Chinese traditional beliefs point to parents' responsibility for children as a central feature of parenting (Luo et al., 2013). Fung and Lau (2009) said parenting in Chinese is referred to as 'Cha Chiao', namely family education. If a child misbehaves, it is a reflection of poor Cha Chiao and as a result, parents are blamed for not having taken their responsibility (Guo, 2013).

On the basis of the belief in parents' responsibility and parents' ability to make a difference in children's lives, Chinese parents demonstrate certain styles and undertake particular practices. While there is much research relating to Chinese parenting style, a definitive conclusion cannot be made about whether they are authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive. Even so, much of what Chinese parents do revolves around one notion, 'training' (Chao, 1994). Training in Chinese parenting is a multi-dimensional practice, constituting parental control, concern, devotion, involvement and sacrifice and close interactions between parents and children. Chao (1994) argues that within the 'training' discourse, the role of Chinese parents is multifaceted. To interpret Chinese parenting too narrowly, from either a style or practice, would result in a predetermined and singular understanding, therefore overlooking the richness of Chinese parenting.

In the contemporary global situation, parenting in China has been hugely influenced by Western ideas. Globalization commenced in China in the 1980s and it intensified twenty years ago. In 1980, first parent schools were established to introduce parents to modern education

and teachers in schools and preschools were running the programs in the evenings or on weekend (Bennett & Grimley, 2000). Parent schools prevailed in China. In 2000, there were more than 240,000 parent schools (Bennett & Grimley, 2000).

In recent years, with the improvement of communication technologies, there has been increased activity and interest in using many other means, such as the World Wide Web to obtain information. It does not need to go abroad to learn about ideas from other countries. Modern parenting knowledge sources become diversified. Parents are more able than ever before to know what happens in other parts of the world. A survey study shows that 90% of urban people in China use the Internet service (Sun & Lancaster, 2013).

A significant consequence of the learning of Western ideas, such as holistic development is that Chinese traditional notions, in particular, the focus on academic success are challenged. Contemporary parenting in China, thus, is implemented in a contested relationship space between Western ideologies and Chinese traditions. Chen-Hafteck and Xu (2008) pointed out that “China is facing challenges as a tug-of-war between local culture and global influences” (p.9). How to reap the undeniable benefits of Western practice, without at the same time losing sight of the Chinese values is the difficult problem of a rapidly complicating Chinese parenting.

A profound change in the flow of Western influence in China, particularly the influx of child rearing and parenting ideas from other countries, has created a new group of unsettling parents. It is interesting to investigate what parental thinking and behaviour persist through the force of a contextual transformation. This question is the topic of this paper. The paper considers ways in which the concept of disposition that reveals patterns of behaviour and habits of mind can help discover persisted attributes of Chinese parenting in a complicating educational dynamic.

From a practical standpoint, dispositional factors exist with situational factors “within a pattern of interwoven socioculturally derived social identities or intent” (Carr, 2001, p.525). The notion of disposition as explained here highlights two aspects. First, disposition and situation coexist. Second, disposition is created by the role or intent of individuals in their complex and multidimensional social and cultural contexts. Carr’s (2001) depiction of disposition reveals the dynamic of inescapable social-personal interrelations that forms the basis of disposed actions.

Patterns of thinking and behaviour have deep roots in social and cultural structure. A study in the UK claimed “disposition as a capacity to engage, which is embedded in social practices which enable that engagement” (Edwards & D’arcy, 2004, p.148). From this perspective, questions of disposition are related to individuals’ social and cultural contexts. They are not necessarily a reflection of trait or personal characteristic. The current study adopts this idea.

Methods

The purpose of this research was to explore the dispositions of contemporary Chinese parents. The research collected data through a modern communication tool, ‘Tencent QQ’, an instant messaging software service which offered synchronous online text chat. Murphy and Collins (1998) promote the use of online chat in research because it allows “a sense of communicative immediacy and presence” (p.3). Similarly, Burnett (2003) states that online chat offsets the problem of some traditional research methods by enabling participants to simultaneously discuss topics at various levels, thus creating an arena for more democratic interactions.

Field work was carried out over ten consecutive days of an hour each day. Data collection focused on the participants’ texts that indicated their hopes, concerns and worries about children and their own parenting. Attempts were made to find ways of understanding parenting dispositions through the expressions of the participants in the online social space. This meant accessing the virtual field of the parents as they interacted with each other. This approach was effective in a way that the researcher was also able to document how the texts were constituted by their online interactions. As far as possible data collection and analysis were simultaneous and the analysis guided the subsequent steps in the research process.

The parents in question were 50 women with academic or professional qualifications, in Chang Chun, a city of 8 million population in Northeast China. The study did not include any fathers because only women registered and participated in the online chat. Apart from two mothers who had two children each, all the other mothers had one child. Their children were aged from three to six and most of them attended preschools on a fulltime basis. The mothers were aged from 25 to 37 and they were all enrolled in the online chat account and participated

in the group instant chat forums for two-hour-per-day that discussed their questions and ideas about child learning with early childhood professionals who provided them with professional advice and consultancy. Information about the participants is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participants' Information*

Age of the mothers (Years)	
25-30	25
31-35	24
36-40	1
Profession	
Professional	43
Business owner	5
House wife	2
Age of the children (Years)	
3-4	20
4.1-5	16
5.1-6	6
Gender of the children	
Boy	27
Girl	25
Family composition	
Mother, father, one child	32
Mother, father, two children	1
Mother, father, child/ren, grandparent	17
Children's childcare	
Kindergarten/preschool	47
Home care by grandparent	3

All the mothers' participation in the forum was a voluntary response to the invitation of their child's early childhood teachers or their own friends. The participants did not see each other and their personal information was only provided during the time of their enrolment so only the people who created the chat forum obtained it. During the online chats, the researcher assumed the role of an early childhood consultant who occasionally joined the chats to guide parents to contribute. However, it is acknowledged that the researcher's identity as an early childhood professional could have affected what the participants wanted to say.

This qualitative study focused on the patterns of behaviour and habits of mind of the parents. The basic unit of analysis was ‘disposition’. This line of inquiry delved into the parents’ verbal and written texts to explore what they said to have revealed patterned thinking or behaviour. Data analysis was ongoing and it was conducted by the researcher putting aside her knowledge base by memoing about her dual roles as a researcher and early childhood participant, and the expectation she held going into the research. The sound files containing the parents’ questions and responses were transcribed verbatim. Using the constant comparative method of data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the researcher generalized content analysis to assess data and engaged in coding and categorization of the verbal and written texts. The process involved three major steps: coding, categorizing and developing themes. The data were firstly sorted into codes around topics that emerged in the process and they were subject to change as later readings generated new codes. Based on their similarities, the coded data were then clustered into categories. These clustered categories led to the construction of themes that represented parent dispositions and indicated how habit of mind and habit of behaviour were shown in the texts. Throughout the process, the researcher safeguarded the quality of data analysis in three ways. First, a pilot analysis of parents’ texts on a single day was conducted with a colleague prior to the actual data analysis. Second, the colleague and researcher cross checked the initial codes. Third, the data were examined repeatedly based on the concepts and ideas from the scholarly literature.

Motivation, Responsibility and Anxiety: The Mothers’ Parenting Dispositions

The study focused on the underlying patterns and characteristics of the mothers’ thinking and behaviour, therefore what they said and did were analysed according to the analytical framework of disposition and they are presented under three general headings explored below.

Motivation for Learning and Improvement

Patterns of ongoing learning, commitments and improvements were reflected in the

mothers' discussions and questions. Data indicated that the mothers' motivation characterized their learning and improvement. The mothers talked about their motivation through examples and comments. The notion that they wanted to 'improve' was typical of the texts. This was the reason why the parents were motivated to learn.

A very salient theme that emerged from the study was the active participation of all the mothers in the discussion forum. Most parents in this study described the opportunity of joining the chat forum as 'valuable and useful'. In so doing, they expected to 'clear doubts' and 'find answers' to some questions about children and their parenting.

Their participation was voluntary. After busy work and household commitments, the mothers all devoted two hours each day for ten days to their own learning about parenting. In expressing their motivation for learning, some mothers shared,

I am so glad to be in this forum to learn with others about how to raise my son. Parenting is a huge responsibility. There is so much to learn.

I am motivated and very keen to learn anything that I should about being a mother.

Parents spoke of learning required for their dealing with children and interpreting children's behaviours that were quite often hard to understand. Supporting children's proper growth demanded appropriate parenting knowledge and strategies, as stated in the following point, 'apart from work, almost all my home time is given to my child. I find being a mother harder and harder so I need to update myself. I can then appropriately raise him'.

Several parents spoke of the vast amount of information available to parents which made their work with children confusing therefore learning in proper ways was important: 'information about child rearing and early education is everywhere, online, on TV, in the market. I just don't know who to trust. So learning from early childhood professionals is important'. Four mother spoke explicitly of learning as a crucial part of parenting, and nine talked about their own poor childhood experience because their own parents never learned.

In the forum, the mothers (48 out of 50) almost universally described their learning as the major agent raising their child. They shared insights that included the following:

I go to any parenting workshops possible. In the past 4 years, I have read many parenting books and find myself constantly learning about child development and about being a mother.

Our own learning of parenting is crucial and it's the most needed way of raising children.

One mother gave examples of how her developing understanding of the importance of early childhood education prompted her to take her own learning seriously.

I think it is very important that-because of the change of views to early childhood education that happens to the whole society...when it comes to the family, the role of parents becomes demanding and difficult...so it is important that we keep abreast with the trend through learning and improving ourselves.

In these phrases, mothers talked about how they had tried hard to gain new knowledge that related to the situations within which they raised children. Here we see the pattern that parents were motivated for learning, emphasizing the parent learning and child learning were interrelated.

Responsibility for Child Care and Education

The similarity in their parenting responsibility for children was also evident in the analysis of the data. There was a definite pattern in the way the parents perceived their role in children's learning and development.

The parents shared their view of parenting as one of the most responsible tasks of human beings which involved parents' active engagement with children and their close monitoring and guiding of children's development.

We have to be responsible for our children.

It's not easy to be a parent because it's a huge responsibility.

We have no choice but take the responsibility to make sure that the child grows properly.

Exploring the idea that parenting was not a natural undertaking, or innate experience but an ongoing job and lifelong commitment was integral in the mothers' communications. The involvement of parents in children's lives and the importance of guiding and monitoring children's learning were essential components of their parenting responsibilities. Engagement and supervision were two attributes that were required of the parents:

We need to be part of our child's life and be there whenever possible, watching, shaping and monitoring their growth.

In their conversations, many mothers (42 out of 50) reflected on details of their children's learning and developmental issues, speaking openly about the importance of parents' responsibility to 'handle the issues' (8 out of 50). For the mothers, their children were essential being in their lives and a part of who they were. For example:

My son has behaviour issues. He is very naughty and sometimes difficult. I have to handle these issues.

My four year old daughter is so spoiled by her grandparents. I need to change that.

My child is part of me. How he grows is an important task of my life.

Raising children does not mean just follow them or might...have a family only. Children present many challenges. To save worries for later, parents need to be responsible for every detail about their children's growth.

Many of the children's behaviours, as the mothers expressed, were dependent on the family and how they played their role as parents. Therefore, for them, environment but not much a child's personality or attribute, played an essential part. For example, one mother spoke about the use of her close participation in her child's social activities as a way of changing the child's peer behaviours.

He didn't share with friends. He shouted or cried when his needs could not be met. I had to be with him every time he went to play in the community playground, correcting his behaviours. It worked quite well. I believe that no child is bad and every child can be properly shaped, as long as parents take responsibilities and be involved.

Anxiety About parenting

Parents' anxiety appeared to be another pattern of their thinking and behaviour. They all (50 out of 50) have acknowledged the difficulty of parenting and discussed their worries about children and child rearing. In stating that 'what can I do?' and 'why is my child so slow in learning?', the parents revealed their thinking and feeling which were characterized by

anxiety, doubt and lack of confidence.

Children's health and life habits were identified as an issue which caused much anxiety of the mothers.

My child often bites finger nails. I'm so worried.

Parents' anxiety about children's living habits were also reflected in points such as,

My 3-year old child has a bad habit. He must eat after 8pm and if not, he wails. We all know that it is bad to eat late, but I cannot stop him.

My child is five. She was born tiny and could not eat proper meals before the age three and even now, still cannot eat much. Sometimes, she eats takeaways. What can I do?

My son is almost four. He sleeps poorly, waking up in the mid night every day and crying. He has been taking calcium. This worries me.

Anxiety about children's social skills is evident in many parents' comments:

My daughter is three. She is in kindergarten. She is active at home but very shy outside. I really hope that she's also active outside. What can I do to help?

My child cares too much about whether peers are not nice to her, or if she has playmates. She cries if another child says not to play with her and becomes very happy if she has peers to be with. It would be great if she is not so sensitive.

Children's emotional responses frequently came through in the data. It was hardly surprising that many mothers (39 out of 50) talked about how their children's tears upset and worried them. Typical comments included:

Duoduo cries over everything. She doesn't know how to regulate emotions. I am very upset. My son just cries if he cannot get what he wants. He cannot express himself in words. This is upsetting and worrying.

Mothers raised many questions about their children's extracurricular experiences. In particular, knowing what activities to do and how to support children's experiences made them anxious:

My child is almost six. He doesn't like anything. I tried to help, but nothing worked. Other children of his age can do a lot, such as sports, or music. He cannot do anything. I am too

worried. What can I do to make him learn something?

My son is five. I don't know what sports he should do. He wants to learn Karate. He is very naughty. I'm worried that learning Karate will cause him trouble.

Some mothers (28 out of 50) were clearly looking forward to their children displaying desirable learning behaviours, such as concentration, persistence and engagement. For example:

Ming can only concentrate for half an hour in his tennis class. He then gets distracted.

What should I do? He is five and big enough.

My child cannot concentrate in any class. I'm worried to death.

Many mothers (41 out of 50) spoke about the current situations of their children's extracurricular activities: they have to race at the starting line. Mothers did not want their young children to lose at the start of their life so the mothers were worried and anxious. They all (41 out of 50) agreed that "as soon as a child can walk properly, extracurricular activities should start". Some mother believed that "it is best to give my young child as many learning opportunities as possible so we can find exactly what she is good at" (one Mother). However, there were a few (8 out of 50) stating that "it is not really how much children learn. What matters is how long they can continue. A good start must lead to a good future". A mother explained:

I had my daughter start learning dancing when she was 2 and tried very hard to push her through. She did not pick up any other things until very recently. Now she is 5... has just started learning English. Dancing continues and I want her to keep up with it.

As indicated in these texts, the mothers deliberated on the present and future lives of their children. In providing children with many extracurricular activities, mothers wanted the children to experience different learning opportunities so the children would win at the start of their lives and this might lead to future success. Because the mothers were considering too much, planning too much and involving themselves too much in their children's lives, they were anxious and anticipative.

Discussion

The data revealed three dispositions of the participating mothers: motivation, responsibility and anxiety. The importance of the mothers' own learning and of their role in children's lives and many associated parenting difficulties were highlighted in their discussions and they brought to life specific issues and matters that influenced and impacted the mothers' thinking and behaviours. The questions and views of parenting were similar among all the participants. This is an unsurprising finding, given their similar beliefs and contexts.

The unifying feature of the accounts of the participants which confirmed that they all played an important role in children's learning was that the mothers were motivated, responsible and anxious parents. These features need to be noticed as dispositions but not styles or practices because they represent patterns and habits of the mothers' thinking and behaviours with regards to child rearing (Katz, 1993).

The importance of self-learning and improvement has been emphasized in the discussions of all the parents. It may be easier to talk about this as a motivation than to understand it simply as learning or change. The paper presents evidence that suggests that key to the parents' learning and improvement is their motivation for being better mothers. They appeared to be keen, passionate and committed learners and these behaviours were all driven by their goal of 'being a mother'. The parents were aware of the challenges lying ahead for them in playing an effective parenting role, so they took learning seriously. For them, children's learning called for the learning of the parents. This need and the goal of 'being a mother' drove them to be motivated parents.

There is an additional reason why the parents' learning and improvement demonstrate the disposition of motivation. It is not only through this discussion forum; the parents took many other learning opportunities to improve their parenting. They displayed a consistent pattern of learning behaviours. If being a [good] mother is the reason why the parents were learning, they demonstrated this pattern of behaviours because they were driven to improve and they were motivated.

The parents' motivation is a result of a complex mix of the Chinese and Western influences. In the Chinese tradition, learning and improvement are highly desirable virtues (Guo, 2014). Within the Chinese context, it is possible to infer that the mothers have been shaped to the

disposition of 'motivation', so they had the tendency to work hard towards goals, and they demonstrated such a pattern of learning and behaviour.

The rise of global resources in China, for instance, Western ideas about childrearing, has seen Western beliefs and practices play a very 'motivating' role in the mothers' learning and improvement (Chen-Hafteck & Xu, 2008). For the educated and professional mothers, many new and innovative approaches to parenting are part of life (Wuyts, Chen, Vansteenkiste & Soenens, 2015). They need to explore and discover more effective parenting models to suit the contemporary situation and support children. The purpose of moving away from the traditional ways of parenting to modern practices is behind the parents' motivation to learn and change.

The parents' disposition of motivation has been accompanied by another disposition, responsibility, which is termed by them as being 'part of our child's life and be[ing] there wherever possible, watching, shaping and monitoring their growth'. As shown in the study, the parents consistently and constantly took responsibilities for the children's learning and development. Their undertaking of responsibilities was not occasional but habitual. Responsibility, thus, was a parenting disposition in this study.

The primary goal of the mothers was focusing on raising emotionally healthy children who were also socially competent. The mothers' strategies for achieving the goal included closely participating in the children's lives, correcting inappropriate behaviours and handling children's issues (Ho et al., 2011). The parents' responsibilities were called for, to remedy environmental inadequacy in children's lives and the parents believed that nurturing and guiding were crucial in children's learning. In some sense, the mothers had a dual responsibility as both responsible adults and motivated learners, representing the complexity of their parenting.

From a 'training' perspective, the idea of parent responsibility underpins their parenting practices and strategies. The goal of parenting is achieved by responsible practices and strategies of the parents. Chen, Wu, Chen, Wang and Cen (2001) argued that the responsibility created practices of Chinese parenting when they wrote that Chinese parents used teaching, disciplining and governing to take their parenting responsibilities.

Rooted in a 'JiaZhang' tradition, it was not surprising to see the Chinese mothers demonstrated the disposition of responsibility. This disposition carries significant cultural

connotations. Building on the idea of 'Cha chiao, the parents focused on family education to ensure proper development of their child. Chao (1994) has argued that parent responsibility is culturally constructed in Chinese families and that understandings of why and how Chinese parents take responsibilities for children should be based on their traditional culture. "These Confucian principles require that the elders must responsibly teach, discipline or govern [children]" (p.1117).

As discussed above, the Chinese mothers were fundamentally and continually influenced by the global context. A view of children as global citizens and as being prepared for the global context should have also contributed to the increasing responsibility of the Chinese mothers to help children succeed (Guo, 2013). Understandings of the needs of the global context could have led the mothers to take more responsibilities for children's learning because the children's environment was increasingly complex and competitive, different from what the mothers had when they were young.

In the mothers' discussions, they were frequently confronted with the realities of child rearing difficulties. Through the forum, they shared issues, their concerns and worries, thereby revealing a clear disposition of anxiety. The interweaving of anxiety and expectation, and of reality and aspiration, offers a significant finding on the participating mothers' feeling, thinking and behaviour.

The mothers situated themselves as struggling and anxious participants in children's life experiences, especially the extracurricular activities. This phenomenon is evident in previous studies (Comeau, Huta & Liu, 2015; Jin, 2004). Underpinning these struggles and concerns were their desire and attempt to explore ways in which children properly grow, and the mothers' lack of confidence in supporting children's development. In an attempt to illustrate their anxiety and expectation, the mothers asked 'what can I do?'.

While the mothers' anxiety seemed to be generated from minor incidents or events, when taken together they pointed to groups of child rearing issues. The mothers were frequently compounded by the children's inadequate social and emotional behaviours, health and safety issues, and too frequently, what extracurricular activities their young child should do and how to support children's learning experiences. Against a background of increasing competition, and its impact on many aspects of young children's learning, and of the growing social and educational pressure, Chinese mothers were facing heightened challenges. This resulted in

their anxiety.

Based on the themes emerged in this study, some implications for early childhood education can be developed to promote teaching both in China and within the global context. Bourdieu (1980) notes that disposition has sociocultural meanings derived not only from individual's personal attributes but also from social and cultural experiences. The educational implications of this study are therefore twofold. Firstly, the research adds a new dimension to existing studies on Chinese parenting and raises questions relating to the dual influence of personal and contextual experiences on shaping and sustaining particular parenting characteristics. It thus challenges the single sided view of parenting, such as parenting style or attitude. Secondly, this analysis discovers ways in which contemporary Chinese mothers respond to child rearing issues and it exposes mental and behavioural features associated with the mothers' responsibilities and their aspirations for children. The exploration of disposition displayed by the mothers shows common themes of motivation, responsibility and anxiety. This exploration sheds light on the 'learner' roles both mothers and children enact and how these roles influence the degree to which the mothers take their parent responsibility which inevitably shapes their emotional states, such as anxiety. From the study of these dispositions emerges an informed pattern of Chinese parenting that could support educators in understanding Chinese children's family experiences within a global context.

Conclusion

This study utilises the concept of disposition to foreground the importance of tradition and living context to Chinese urban parents' patterned ways of thinking and behaving. The findings draw attention to the cultural tradition and contemporary situation of China and how the complex Chinese-global context is shaping parenting. Through a close interpretation of the data, I was able to gain a deep appreciation of the ways in which Chinese mothers felt, thought about and acted on their roles in young children's lives. My analysis results in the development of three dispositions that reveal the patterned and habitual ways of parenting of the participating mothers: motivation, responsibility and anxiety. Together these dispositions help conceptualize what I refer to as their sustained feeling, thinking and acting and they

characterize the mothers' sense making of moving between Chinese traditions and global influences on parenting. The study implies that globalization and its associated Western ways of child rearing have resulted in the diffusion of a Chinese-Western approach to Chinese parenting. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of this study potentially generate reflections of the contextual logics which influence parents both in China and globally.

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