

Life Chances and Birth Registration: A Study from Rural China

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Abstract

In recent years early childhood education has become a focus for ambitious reforms in China. The emphasis on early experiences in this study was designed to address issues of unequal life chances, that is, the opportunities that individuals have to improve their lives across the life span. Children in rural China are more likely to be educationally disadvantaged and lack of birth registration compounds this problem. This paper examines data from rural China that was designed to collect household information including details of birth registration. The survey data indicated that a significant number of children in the study had no birth registration. Here we contrast the families with a registered child and the families with an unregistered child in relation to their knowledge of childrearing and how their knowledge and beliefs were put into practice. Findings indicate that there were identifiable differences in the two groups and these may be significant for policy makers and local governments when designing interventions to assist in alleviating poverty.

Keywords: early childhood, rural China, birth registration, family characteristics

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Early childhood education (ECE) is attracting attention from national and global agencies largely due to the benefits promised by what has become known as the new economics of ‘life cycle skill formation’ (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). Investing in the home and formal education that children receive prior to the compulsory school years is an effective means of enabling children to become lifelong learners and hence is a long-term means of raising workforce skills. Early childhood education has become a focus for ambitious reforms in China (Zhou, 2011). Emphasis on early experiences are designed to address issues of unequal life chances, to support economic growth and promote the development of an educated and skilled workforce to meet the demands of work in the twenty-first century. The life chances (Weber, 1978) approach is adopted here as we would claim that the act of not registering children at birth is a way of ascribing disadvantage that will have a lifelong impact. Children in rural China are more likely to be educationally disadvantaged (Luo et al, 2012) and lack of birth registration compounds this problem.

The international literature on the implications of not having a birth registration is extensive (Liu, 2004; Todres, 2003; Zhou, 2005). Todres (2003) states that: “Birth registration ... is one of the most important events in a child’s life” (p. 32). Initial registration is linked to health and well-being issues like immunisation and maternal health as well as problems that arise from not having a legal identity. Lack of registration at a later stage has implications for access to basic education and leaves children particularly vulnerable to exploitation like trafficking and child labour (Todres, 2003). A lack of official papers in any country renders a child stateless and without rights of citizenship (Gerber, Gargett & Castan, 2011).

The argument presented here is that there is a strong relationship between parenting knowledge, early educational experiences and life chances (Weber, 1978). One finding consistently confirmed by scholars and practitioners who address the association between social inequality and early childhood development is that attention needs to centre on both formal early childhood education provision and the nature of the homes in which children are nurtured. Indeed, the home is considered to have a greater impact on the cognitive and emotional development of the young child than does formal early childhood education (Cassen, Feinstein & Graham, 2009). Research underpinning this consensus has been reviewed by Case and Paxson (2008) who claim the evidence that social inequality has a

significant impact on young children's capacity to learn and realise innate capacities throughout their lives is compelling.

Birth registration is considered to be a matter of parental choice (Zhou, 2005), and also a structural disadvantage for the unregistered person (Weber, 1978). This paper explores the differences between the families in rural China who registered their child and those who did not. Findings are based on a survey designed to collect household information including details of birth registration, to identify patterns that may be useful in recognising characteristics of families who may be less likely to register their child. In this study, which families did not register their children, circumstances surrounding this decision and relating birth registration to family childrearing practices has implications for policy development and implementation, regulation and individual wellbeing and is timely as the gap between early childhood educational experiences in rural and urban areas is a growing concern for the Chinese government (China State Council, 2010). The research question addressed: Do rural Chinese families who do not register their children at birth have identifiable characteristics that could influence the decision not to register the child?

Literature Review

In the international literature causes given for why certain populations do not register their children at birth include: cost, travel, late and wanted to avoid fine, unaware of how, or necessity, to register child and "other" (UNICEF, 2005, p. 4). China differs from other countries and has unique circumstances brought about by historical, political and economic events. Aspects of the collectivist Soviet economic era, like the household registration system, influence present practices. Issues that impact on birth registration that are particular to China are the hukou system (household registration), birth restriction policies and the rural-urban divide. Although being relaxed in 2016 the restricted child policy was considered to be one of the factors negatively affecting birth registration. The parents of an additional child were seen as committing an offence and required to pay a fine. There is also a fine attached to failure to register the child within 30 days of birth. For impoverished parents the onus of fines for an additional child, or failing to register the birth in the

stipulated time, would be a strong driver in deciding not to register the child. These have been compounded in recent years by the huge migration of peasant families to the cities. The hukou system has meant many migrants have seen their children denied basic rights, like access to education because of their place of birth or lack of registration. Migrants apply to the household registration authorities for temporary residence permission and there is a fee for this recognition of temporary residence. Some parents cannot afford this fee, while others do not see an advantage in applying and many avoid registering in order to avoid restrictions (Liu, 2004).

The question of birth registration is complex. Zhou (2005) cites a study by Chen and Wang that examined data from a 1992 National Fertility and Family Planning Survey. The information reported from the study suggested that urban areas had a much higher percentage of unregistered children, remote areas had higher rates of registration and that rural women's education was negatively associated with registration. Zhou (2005) found an association between remote areas, illiterate females and higher registration rates. This pattern was explained by community level forces like local family planning policies and the administration of registration. Local governments might also have an interest in covering up unregistered children as they are responsible for implementing uniform registration practices. Zhou (2005) reported on a study of unregistered infants in China based on the China 1990 census. The data examined had national coverage which included 30 provinces and autonomous regions and focused on three aspects of the issue; community level policies, parental characteristics and the child in relation to gender and birth position in the family. Based on series of bivariate logistic regressions Zhou found that the older the infant the more likely the child was to be registered, girls were at a slightly higher risk of being unregistered than boys ($\beta = .104$), the residential status of the mother was a factor ($\beta = 1.997$) and mothers with no hukou were less likely to register their children ($\beta = 1.28$).

Liu (2004) supported Zhou's conclusions while concentrating on legislation and administrative practices, many of which tended to support the existence of unregistered children if their birth did not comply with laws and regulations pertaining to such aspects of the parents' lives as marriage, citizenship, resident identity and public security (Liu, 2004). Since the 1990s the 'floating' population of internal migrants have seen more than half the Chinese population now residing in cities (Feiwen & Zheng, 2012). The plight of the

children of migrant workers, China's population policies and the role and power of the state were discussed by Greenhalgh (2003). This article contained comment on planned and unplanned births in Chinese urban areas. Greenhalgh (2003) described what she called a "modernist binary" (p. 196) juxtaposing a stereotypical planned child of wealthy urban parents with unplanned migrant children in China's cities:

Elsewhere never in the same frame are cultural images of the unplanned child who is not supposed to exist. Usually the offspring of rural migrants in the cities, it is the uneducated, ragged, unhealthy child who is crying or fighting, disrupting social order, and generally polluting the cities' margins (Greenhalgh, 2003, p. 196).

She concluded that the "social body" (p. 210), or the regulated population, must be part of a discourse on social and political control that could have implications for state plans to develop the more equitable and harmonious society (Zheng & Tok, 2007). A study by Li, Zhang and Feldman (2010), based on data from the Institute for Population and Development Studies and Plan International, collected in 2004-2005, found that birth registration in China was low in rural areas and there were serious disruptions to the process of registration caused by administrative difficulties. Liu (2004) detailed some of the administrative and legislative dimensions that might impact on the registration of a child's birth and also identified levels of stakeholder interactions that influence parents' decisions. Li, Zhang and Feldman (2010) analysed data from government officials at national, provincial and county levels. These departments included family planning, health, hygiene and public security. They concluded that:

... the multiple stakeholders engendered by the multiple departments pose many barriers to BR [Birth Registration]. However, the most important influence on BR is the ignorance of policy-makers, relevant staff members and the general population about its significance (p. 312).

Other concerns influence registration decisions. The preference for sons in rural China has had an influence on which children might be registered. The sex ratio in China with a bias towards boys was strong in Confucian times (Li, 2000) and became more balanced during the early years of the People's Republic (Zhou, Wang, Zhou & Hesketh, 2012). Zhou et al. (2012) cite Park and Cho (1995) as saying that there is a sex ratio imbalance when small families are more culturally acceptable, there is easy access to sex-selective abortion and this is stronger in agrarian economies. These are elements to be found in rural

China. A tragic side to this imbalance was the trafficking of girl babies (*South China Morning Post*, 2005) where female infants have been sold to families that have a son. Even when rescued by police it is often difficult to locate the birth parents of these children. It can be assumed that unwanted girl babies are unlikely to be documented. This supposition was supported by Goodkind (2011) who identified a gap in the literature where researchers have tended to neglect the issue of under-reporting when studying the birth planning system and suggested that under-reporting is greater for girls than boys. There was some indication that the 'Care for Girls' program, launched by the government in 2004, has made a difference (Goodkind, 2011). However, Zhou et al. (2012) thought existing inequities in the sex ratios would create problems for decades to come.

Birth registration is considered a fundamental human right (Liu, 2004) so this paper has policy implications for those children who are most disadvantaged. These include children affected by migration and children living in poor, rural areas (UNICEF, 2010). Previous research has focussed on historical, policy and administrative problems related to birth registration in China (e.g., Goodkind, 2011; Li, Zhang & Feldman, 2010; Liu, 2004; Zhou, 2005) and this paper adds to the literature by examining family characteristics that might impact on registration decisions. The focus is on aspects of the child's home experience and child-rearing beliefs that the international research literature suggests are of high significance (e.g., Davis-Kean, 2005; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Melhuish, 2010) and these include the importance of promoting language and literacy, parental attitudes to gender, beliefs about child rearing practices like discipline and a child's right to be heard.

The Research

In this section of the paper, the survey data is described, the research hypothesis is presented, selected key variables are identified and findings are reported.

Data Source

The data we draw upon in this paper is a UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (UNICEF, 2012; Zhou et al., 2012), an instrument developed to provide information on families in relation to child care practices, parent' attitudes and knowledge of raising children.

Survey instrument: The LARC project. The Local Action for Rural Children (LARC) project was a co-operative program between the Chinese government and UNICEF. LARC was designed to collect household information across 20 counties in China between the years 2006 and 2010. Eight counties in seven provinces elected to focus on early childhood development (ECD). The questionnaires used to collect baseline data in these eight counties were part of the UNICEF international household survey initiative, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). These surveys are described as “modular tools that can be adapted to the needs of the country” (UNICEF Statistics and Monitoring, 2012). The baseline household survey used for this research was conducted in 2007 and contained six sections; general household information, birth registration, early childhood educational experiences, children's health and parents' knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) towards childrearing (UNICEF, 2010; Zeng & Long, 2012).

Data specification. Stratified sampling was adopted in the process of conducting the baseline survey, subject to the quality of the township level census. There were 3197 effective samples. The samples generally accorded with the gender and age distribution of the children in the area. Most of the sample children were of Han ethnicity.

Among the participants 2843 selected the option on the survey that the child has the name that is in the household registration book, in other words the child has birth registration. Another option was the child had household registration but the participant declined to show the registration book. There were 93 in this category. The third group acknowledged the child had no registration. There were 184 participants who selected this option. The final choice was “do not know” and 50 selected this option. There were 27 missing replies. The numbers of participants included in this research were groups one and

three, giving a total of 3027. Through a comparison with the 2843 families, who did register their children, we profile the 184 families who did not to establish patterns and characteristics of these families that may help explain their omission.

Table 1. *Description of Samples*

County	Valid N	Sex distribution		Age distribution according to the birth year (%)						
		Male	female	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Heshun	401	219	173	2.0	23.2	22.7	19.7	10.7	11.5	9.7
Daan	401	226	170	4.0	18.0	26.9	17.0	11.5	10.0	11.7
Wushan	397	251	145	6.8	19.6	20.9	17.9	15.6	10.8	8.3
Tongwei	397	260	133	10.6	29.0	23.9	11.6	11.6	6.8	6.5
Shiqian	400	241	154	16.1	21.2	19.4	11.3	14.4	11.3	6.3
Suizhong	400	206	192	1.0	14.3	23.8	15.8	17.0	14.3	14.0
Linquan	401	245	156	10.2	13.5	17.7	16.5	14.7	14.0	13.5
Ningling	400	235	162	0.5	19.5	19.0	22.0	17.3	11.0	10.8

*Valid N of each county was calculated based on effective questionnaires. The number of sex and age distribution might not equal to Valid N in some county because of missing data.

Research Hypothesis

Based on previous research, on child development and birth registration, the hypothesis that basic family characteristics such as gender, hukou and parents' KAP towards childrearing would be significantly different between families who registered their children and those who did not was adopted for this study.

Variable Selection

We selected indicators of basic family characteristics including family wealth, parents' education level, the child's age, gender, hukou type and whether child was a 'left-behind' child (Wang, 2012). In view of data availability, the proxy variables of parents' KAP

towards childrearing were selected, including knowledge about raising and educating children according to gender, parental expectations of children listening to their parents and parental disciplinary practices, parental attitudes to children's questioning behaviours, parental attitudes to children's own ideas, the education level parents hope their child will achieve, mother's involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities, father's involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities and anyone's involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities.

Research Procedure

The purpose of this research was to compare characteristics of the families who did not register their child compared to the families who did and Chi-Square Tests were used to justify the variances between the two groups. Basic family characteristics are described and the variance of parents' KAP towards childrearing between the two groups is reported by producing Chi-Square Test table.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 (below) describes the indicators of basic family characteristics that, based on the literature review (Wang, 2012) and previous research are factors that would impact on parents' knowledge of KAP. The difference between the two groups being compared, those that registered their children and those that did not are expressed in relation to family wealth, education level of the parents, the child's age, reported as an average, gender, hukou type and whether child was a 'left-behind' child by parents who moved away to seek employment.

Table 2. *Basic Variances about Family Characteristics between Two Groups*

Family characteristics	Distribution		Sig.(2-tailed)
	Registered	Unregistered	
Mean of Age	3.24	1.70	.000*
Gender			.107
<i>Male</i>	60%	54%	
<i>Female</i>	40%	46%	
Hukou			.000*
<i>Agriculture</i>	80.89%	94.02%	
<i>non-agriculture</i>	19.11%	5.98%	
“Left behind” children	48.46%	55.98%	.048*
Family wealth			
<i>Possession of mobile phones</i>	63.07%	41.30%	.000*
<i>Possession of refrigerators</i>	29.40%	16.03%	.000*
Parents’ education level			
<i>Fathers’ education level above high school</i>	25.41%	10.87%	.000*
<i>Mothers’ education level above high school</i>	15.86%	4.89%	.000*

(significant at $\alpha=0.1$ level)

Note:

a. Variance of age between two groups was examined by Independent T-test based on continuous variable, while others were justified by Chi-square Test.

b. As age is continuous variable, we report the average age of the children in registered and unregistered group in this table.

The age of the children. The unregistered group (1.70) was significantly lower than the registered group (3.24) based on the independent T-test ($p=.00$). The cases of unregistered were concentrated in the younger age groups.

The gender of children. The percentage of male children in the registered group and unregistered group was 60% and 54% respectively, but not significant in the Chi-Square Test ($p=.107$). There is a body of literature on ‘son preference’ that identified gender bias as a reason for children receiving different educational opportunities and even health care (Goodkind, 2011; Liu, 2004; Zhou, 2005; Zhou, et al., 2012). Gender discrimination has been widely reported in rural China. In China there is evidence that son preference is on the

decline (Zhou et al., 2012) although sex ratios at birth are still amongst the highest in the world. In this research the results indicate that there was no significant sex preference for child registration. Either lack of registration was evenly balanced or, as suggested by Zhou (2005), lots of unregistered baby girls in this category were not captured by the survey.

The Hukou Type of the Children. The unregistered group had a significantly higher percentage of agricultural hukou (94.02%) than the registered group (80.89%) in the Chi-Square Test ($p=.00$). The assumption was that different hukou types have common variance with public services for children's education and development and historically children with agricultural hukou are more likely to be disadvantaged.

The "left behind" children. In the 12 months before the survey was conducted the percentage of parents absent, due to work, in the unregistered group (55.98%) was significantly higher than the registered group (48.46%) in the Chi-Square Test ($p=.048$). Research studies indicate that 'left behind' children may be more disadvantaged than those who live with their parents. A study of school aged children (Wang, 2012) found that disruption to the immediate family had a greater effect than the increased wealth from monies sent home. Biao (2007) suggested that though there seemed only a marginal individual difference between children 'left behind' and those who live with their families the whole rural community might be 'left behind' economically and socially.

Family wealth. Possession of a fixed asset such as a refrigerator and mobile phone, as a measure of wealth, is commonly used in the MICS survey (UNICEF, 2012). The registered group had a significantly higher percentage of mobile phones (63.07%) and refrigerators (29.40%) than the unregistered group (41.30% and 16.30% respectively) in the Chi-Square Test ($p=.000$). One county had the highest percentage of unregistered children (33%) and this county had a lower percentage of mobile phones (49%) and refrigerators (21%). Child registration in China requires fees, so family wealth is a possible influence on registration.

Parents' education level. There were statistically significant variance on the education

levels of the father and mother between the two groups based on the Chi-Square Test ($p=.00$). Fathers' education level above high school in registered group (25.41%) was much higher than the unregistered (10.87%). Mothers' education level above high school in registered group (15.86%) was much higher than the unregistered (4.89%). Research has consistently shown that parent education level is a predictor of children's educational attainment levels e.g., Davis-Kean, 2005).

Based on the results above the unregistered group were children who were likely to be at an economic disadvantage in relation to family wealth, hukou type, educational levels of the parents, were younger and more likely to have been "left behind" by parents working away from home.

Variances about Parents' KAP towards Childrearing

Adult participation in their child's day covering a range of knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) is reported on in this section. The following Table 3 contains information about the parent knowledge of raising and educating their children, questions about attitudes to discipline and listening to children as well as a series of questions asked about home activities in the three days previous to the survey being conducted.

As Table 3 indicates, these proxy variables show significant variances with parents' KAP towards childrearing between the registered group and the unregistered group. For China the question of gender is an important one, especially for rural families (e.g., Goodkind, 2011; Zhou, 2005). However, the issue of the child's gender and parental beliefs about raising and educating girls or boys did not display a strong difference in the registered and unregistered groups.

The following Tables and Graphs were generated based on each of the KAP questions. The results of the questions have been expressed as Tables (Tables 4-10) and also by an accompanying graph (Figures 1 - 7). Table 4, below refers to the question: When your child does not listen to you and does not behave well, what is your most commonly used method of education? Parent responses to perceived inappropriate behaviours and guidance strategies are important indicators of child-rearing practice.

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Table 3. *Pearson Chi-Square Test about Parents' KAP towards Childrearing in Registered Group and the Unregistered Group*

Proxy variables of parents' KAP towards childrearing	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Parents' Knowledge			
Is raising boy different from raising girl?	4.384	2	.112
Is educating boy different from educating girl?	9.058	2	.011
Parents' Attitudes			
Parental expectations of children listening to their parents and parental disciplinary practices	50.469	3	.000**
Parental attitudes to children's questioning behaviours	6.783	1	.009*
Parental attitudes to children's own ideas	22.008	1	.000**
The education level parents hope their child will achieve	29.625	4	.000**
Parents' Practices			
Mother's involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities:			
read books or picture books with the child	53.046	1	.000**
told stories to the child	29.413	1	.000**
sang songs with the child	27.839	1	.000**
took the child out on an excursion	7.211	1	.007*
played with the child	18.312	1	.000**
played games, like counting, with the child	38.716	1	.000**
Father's involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities:			
read books or picture books with the child	36.647	1	.000**
told stories to the child	40.066	1	.000**
sang songs with the child	33.043	1	.000**
took the child out on an excursion	12.024	1	.001**
played with the child	24.200	1	.000**
played games, like counting, with the child	18.346	1	.000**
Anyone's involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities:			
read books or picture books with the child	35.290	1	.000**
told stories to the child	25.075	1	.000**
sang songs with the child	34.031	1	.000**
took the child out on an excursion	10.881	1	.001**
played with the child	29.511	1	.000**
played games, like counting, with the child	34.102	1	.000**

** : Significant at the .005 level, * : significant at .01 level.

Table 4. *Methods of Behaviour Guidance Used by Parents*

Groups	N	Beating, physical punishment	Reprimand, scold	Give advice, tell him why	Does not do anything
registered	2824	256 (9.07%)	513 (18.17%)	1964 (69.55%)	91 (3.22%)
Unregistered	182	29 (15.95%)	50 (27.47%)	85 (46.70%)	18 (9.89%)

The registered group and unregistered group had statistically significant variance in the most commonly used methods of discipline when they perceived the child was not listening to the parents and was not behaving well. As can be seen from the table above, the unregistered group reported a much higher percentage of beating, physical punishment, reprimand, and scolding as well as not doing anything. However, the registered group displayed a higher percentage of giving advice and explanations (69.55%) than the unregistered group (46.70%). The unregistered group had more “left behind” children and many of these might be cared for by their grandparents (Nyland, Zeng, Nyland & Tran, 2009) compared to children in the registered group. Parents will often report on having different ideas and standards for raising children from their parents and grandparents. This can be partly explained by historical circumstances. Like many Western countries the Chinese population has enjoyed overall increased prosperity in recent years. Such a change may result in altered attitudes within the family towards authority, discipline and the right to an opinion. The questions asked here relate to these changing attitudes. There is also evidence to suggest that many disciplinary practices, like physical punishment, are not necessarily intergenerational (Ghate, Hazel, Creighton, Finch & Field, 2003). Figure 1, below indicates the differences between the two groups being compared in relation to the question on behaviour guidance cited at the top of the figure.

Table 5 below refers to the question: To your child, which is more important, habit of reading or habit of asking questions? This question contrasts parents’ attitudes to curiosity and questioning behaviours and more overtly studious activities like book reading.

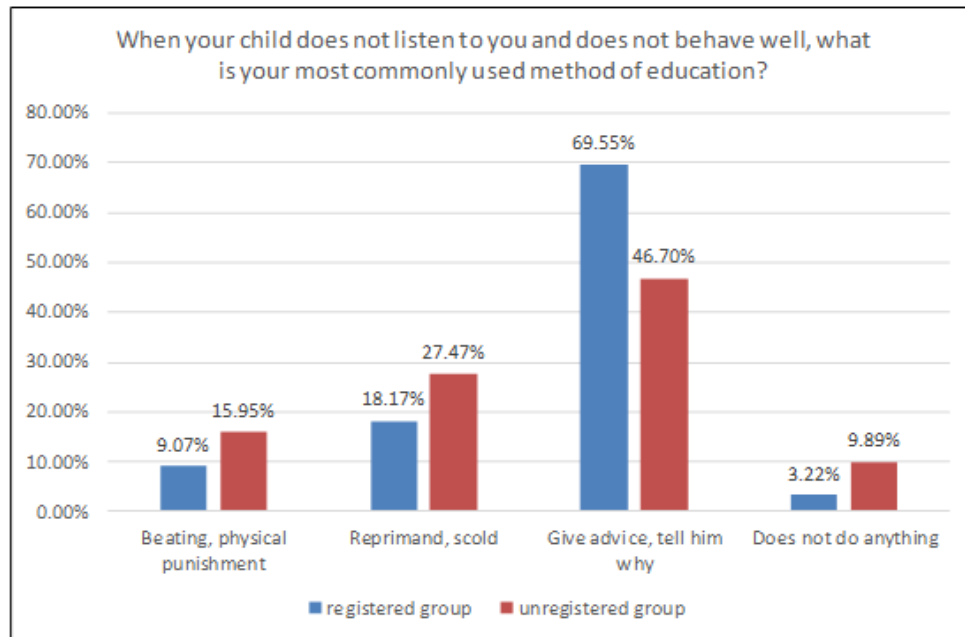


Figure 1. Methods of Behaviour Guidance Used by Parents

Table 5. *Contrasting the Learning Dispositions of Questioning and an Interest in Books*

Groups	N	Reading habit	Asking questions
registered	2456	1059 (43.12%)	1397 (56.88%)
unregistered	148	80 (54.05%)	68 (45.95%)

The registered group had 56.88% of parents reporting that the habit of asking questions is more important than reading, which was statistically significantly higher than the unregistered group (45.95%). The child's habit of asking questions was encouraged by parents in the registered group. Figure 2, below contrasts the groups of parents with registered children to those of the unregistered children. The question on the importance of book reading or the child asking questions is related to attitudes to

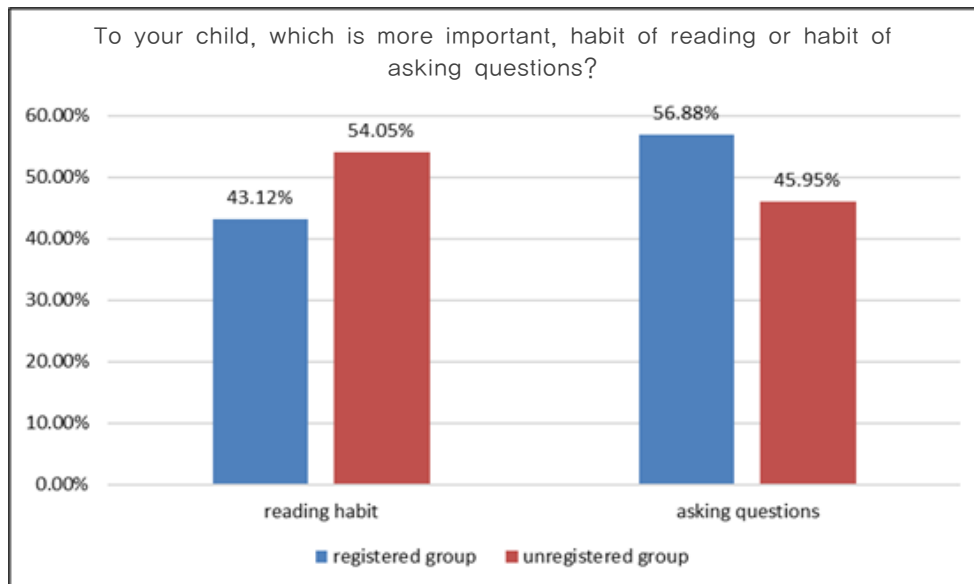


Figure 2. Contrasting the Learning Dispositions of Questioning and an Interest in Books

Table 6 explores answers to the question: Which do you like more, the child obeys you or the child has his own ideas? This question is indicative of parental attitudes of how they perceive the child, as an extension of themselves or as an independent learner.

Table 6. Parental Attitudes to Children's Own Ideas

Group	N	Child obeys me	Child has his own ideas
registered	2660	1131 (42.52%)	1529 (57.48%)
unregistered	167	102 (61.08%)	65 (38.92%)

The question in table 6 asked for a response to the idea that children should hold independent opinions and be able to express these opinions. Parents in the unregistered group preferred children to display obedient habits rather than question their parent's ideas. The registered group had a significantly higher percentage of parents that thought children should express their own ideas than obey their parents (57.48%). The percentage in the unregistered group who thought it was preferable that children should be questioning was 38.92%. Obedience and the value of developing independent problem solving skills are

contrasted in this question and the following Figure 3 provides a graphic contrast between the two groups of parents being compared.

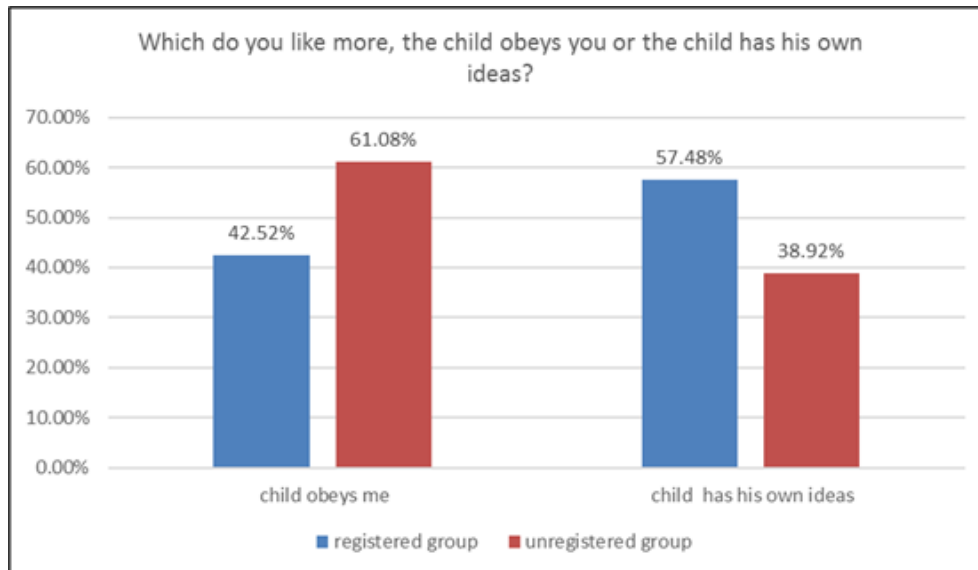


Figure 3. Parental Attitudes to Children's Own Ideas

Table 7 provides information on the education level parents hope their child will achieve and refers to the question: What is the lowest educational level you hope your child should get?

As we can see from Table 7, the education level that parents hoped their children would attain was significantly lower in unregistered group compared to the registered group. In the unregistered group, the percentage of parents who hoped their children would gain an education level of junior high school (9.84%) and senior high school (28.96%) was much higher than registered group (3.15% and 24.80% respectively). The percentage of parents in the registered group who hoped their children would gain a bachelor degree or above (44.53%) was much higher than the unregistered group (32.24%). Based on the description of the family's basic characteristics, the education level of parents in the registered group was significantly higher than the parents in the unregistered group and research indicates an association between parents' own knowledge of education, aspirations for their children

and children's own levels of education. Parental experience and level of education is a measure of expectations for their own children. The question asked for the lowest level of education the parent hoped the child would achieve. The difference in expectations is set out in Figure 4.

Table 7. *The Education Level Parents Hope Their Child Will Achieve*

Group	N	Primary school	Junior High school	Senior High school	Polytechnics	Bachelor degree or above	Have not Thought about this
registered	2827	8 (0.28%)	89 (3.15%)	701 (24.80%)	656 (23.20%)	1259 (44.53%)	114 (4.03%)
unregistered	183	0	18 (9.84%)	53 (28.96%)	43 (23.50%)	59 (32.24%)	10 (5.46%)

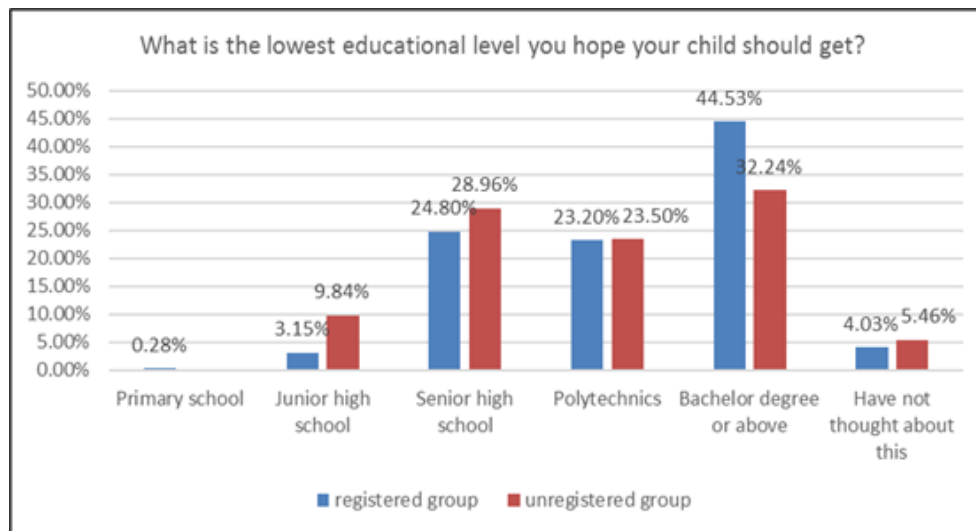


Figure 4. The Education Level Parents Hope Their Child Will Achieve

Table 8, below, contains information from the question that inquired into the Mothers' involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities. The question: In the last 3 days, had the mother of the child read books or picture books with the child/told stories to the child/sang songs with the child/took the child out on an excursion/played with the

child/played games, like counting, with the child?

Table 8. *Mothers' Involvement in the Child's Home Language and Literacy Activities.*

Group	read books or picture books with the child	told stories to the child	sang songs with the child	took the child out on an excursion	played with the child	Played games, like counting, with the child
registered	51.02%	51.92%	46.38%	46.00%	69.04%	61.19%
unregistered	21.82%	30.36%	25.00%	35.33%	53.45%	37.06%

In the last 3 days, the percentage of mothers who engaged in the listed activities in the registered group were all statistically significantly higher than in the unregistered group. This result is expressed in Figure 5 below.

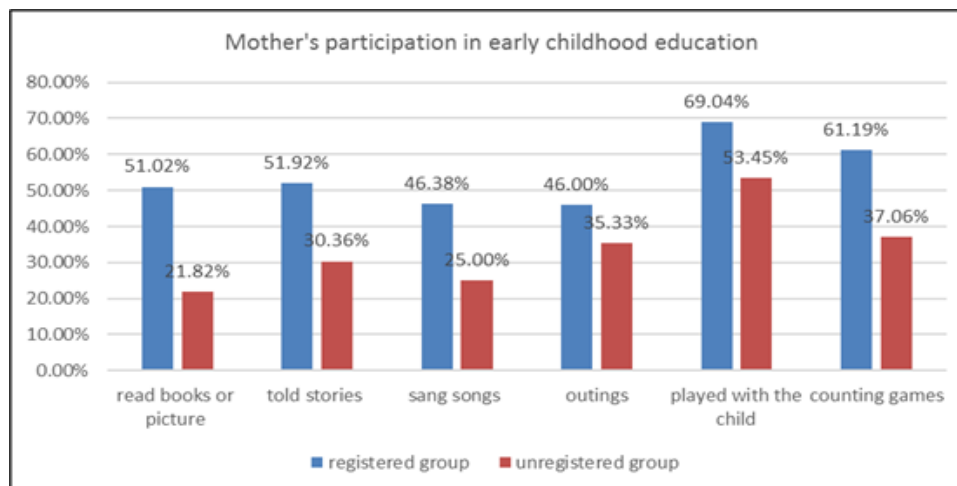


Figure 5. Mothers' Involvement in the Child's Home Language and Literacy Activities

The next question (Table 9) asked about the Fathers' involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities: In the last 3 days, had the father of the child read books or picture books with the child/told stories to the child/sang songs with the child/took the child out on an excursion/played with the child/played games, like counting, with the child? The

results are reported in Table 9.

Table 9. *Fathers' Involvement in the Child's Home Language and Literacy Activities*

Group	read books or picture books with the child	told stories to the child	sang songs with the child	took the child out on an excursion	played with the child	Played games, like counting, with the child
registered	36.88%	36.48%	27.35%	31.83%	53.05%	43.87%
unregistered	13.21%	11.88%	6.45%	18.75%	33.33%	26.95%

In the comparison with the mothers of registered and unregistered children the percentage of fathers participated in home language and literacy activities in registered group were all statistically significantly higher than the unregistered group. These significant differences can be clearly seen in Figure 6.

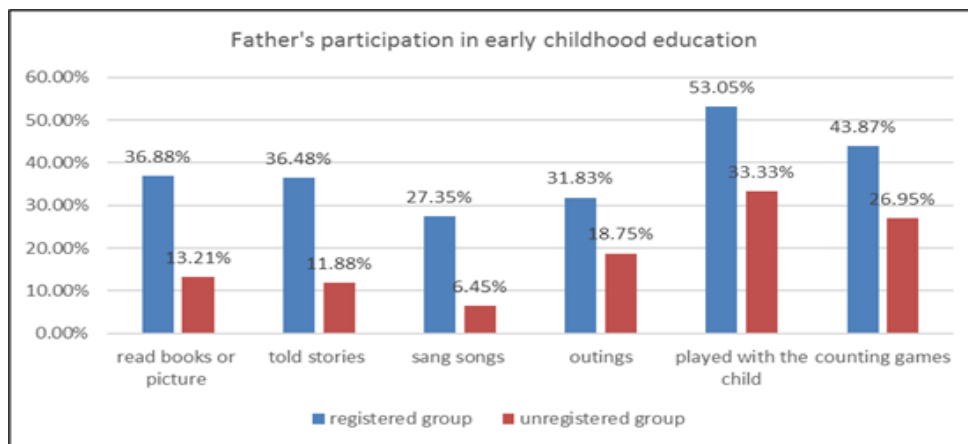


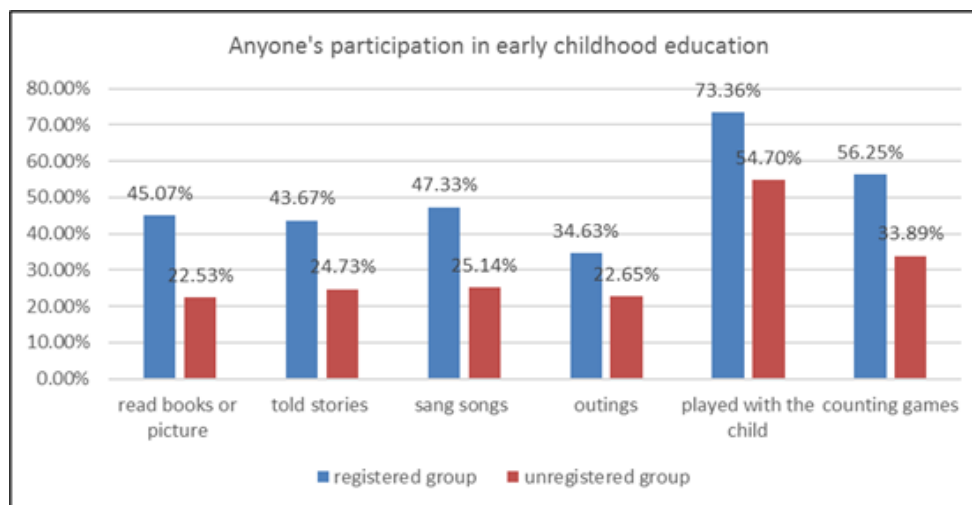
Figure 6. Fathers' Involvement in the Child's Home Language and Literacy Activities

Table 10 refers to the question about anyone's involvement in the child's home language and literacy activities: In the last 3 days, had anyone been involved in book reading or associated activities?

Table 10. *Anyone's Involvement in the Child's Home Language and Literacy Activities*

Group	read books or picture books with the child	told stories to the child	sang songs with the child	took the child out on an excursion	played with the child	Played games, like counting, with the child
registered	45.07%	43.67%	47.33%	34.63%	73.36%	56.25%
unregistered	22.53%	24.73%	25.14%	22.65%	54.70%	33.89%

This third category is assumed to be grandparents and other carers who had interacted with the child during the period in question. As Table 9 indicates the percentage of anyone engaging in home literacy promotion were all statistically significantly higher in the group where the child was registered. Once again there was a considerable difference in home literacy experiences for the two groups and these differences are expressed in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. *Anyone's Involvement in the Child's Home Language and Literacy Activities*

In summary, parental KAP towards childrearing in the registered group was significantly different to those of the unregistered group. Parents in the registered group tended to give

advice to children more than punish them, respect children's own ideas and encourage them to ask questions. They also had higher aspirations for educational levels for their children for the future. In practice, they spent much more time participating in home play and literacy events with children.

Conclusion

From the literature review we identified specific conditions in China that might influence parent's decision on whether to register a child. These were the hukou system (household registration), the restricted child policy, internal migration, gender preference and administrative difficulties. All of these constraints are policies of the Chinese government and administered by differing levels of government across the country.

The registered group and unregistered group were compared statistically using home experience and child-rearing beliefs based on UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. From the comparative results the conclusion is that the unregistered group had significant variance with basic family characteristics and parents' KAP compared to the registered group. It is noted that while birth registration does not of itself guarantee education, health, protection or participation, its absence can put these fundamental rights beyond the reach of those already on the margins of society (UNICEF, 2002, p. 2).

Identifying 184 families who were less likely to register their child meant emerging patterns and themes could be identified. Basic information about children who were not registered contained some aspects of experience that were represented as risk factors in the literature. A higher percentage of unregistered children were female and the parents who had failed to register their children were more likely to have an agricultural hukou. The educational levels of both mothers and fathers in this group were statistically lower than those in the group where the children were registered. These parents were also more likely to have spent more time away from the child and the family home for reason of employment.

The home educational experiences of the unregistered children were less than those in the registered group. Melhuish (2010) observed that where parents are resource rich they

have an enhanced capacity to provide children with an array of services, goods, parental actions and social connections that benefit their development. These early childhood relationships and activities are crucial:

[E]arly environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential. Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the evolving circuitry of the brain to the emerging capacity of the child to solve problems and experience empathy, is affected by the cumulative influences of life experience, which are mediated most powerfully by the nature and quality of the child's most important relationships (Shonkoff, 2003, p. 70).

Shonkoff (2003) concluded that not only are household resources critical to early-years child development but the most important were parent's employment, income/wealth, education and child development beliefs. It would appear that the parents who did not register their children were less advantaged than the parents who did on a number of levels that included education and parental beliefs about child development. This finding has profound implications for improving early child education and development by supporting parents. Although China has sought to reform children's educational experiences by the promulgation of a number of policies since 2009, the home, as a part of this initiative, has not received particular attention. The main thrust of recent policies in China has been towards universalizing preschool education. However changes are occurring and part of the ongoing discussion could be the changing role of officials, like family planning officers, as the restricted child policy is relaxed. One pilot program, the Rural Education Action Program (Ash, 2016) has already introduced the concept of existing officers engaging in family support services that include introducing strategies for games and books that support language and literacy development to be introduced into rural homes.

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