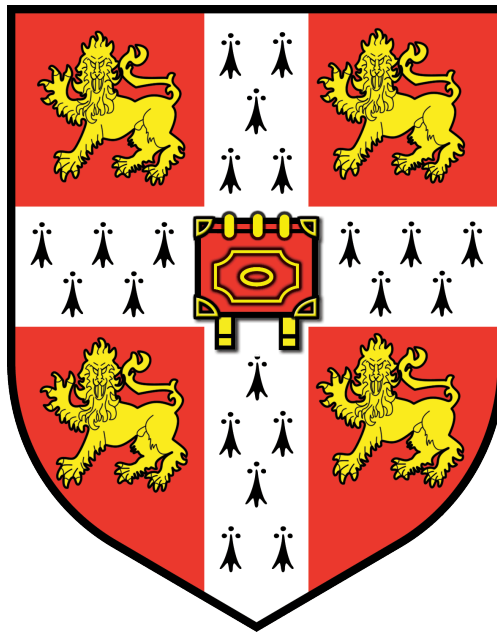


An ethnographic study of ‘Steiner Fever’ in China:
Why are Chinese parents turning away from
mainstream education towards the holistic ‘way’ of
Steiner education?



Yifan Sun

Trinity Hall

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Education - University of Cambridge

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 words.

SUMMARY/ABSTRACT

Yifan Sun, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

Title: An ethnographic study of ‘Steiner Fever’ in China: Why are Chinese parents turning away from mainstream education towards the holistic ‘way’ of Steiner education?

In recent years, China has seen a major expansion of alternative education, an aspect of which is the ‘Steiner Fever’, which refers to Steiner (Waldorf) education’s rapid growth in this country. Steiner education (providing early childhood, elementary and secondary education) as an alternative education model, aims to promote the development of a child’s natural curiosity and capacities while also stimulating intellectual awareness in order to develop the ‘whole child’ (Oberman, 2007). There is a general lack of scholarship on alternative education in China, in particular, Steiner education in China is little understood.

I approached this study with an overarching question: *What is at stake in the feverish manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?* Guided by the research aims and my research questions, I attempted to explore ‘Steiner Fever’ by investigating choices, perceptions and experiences of parents and teachers in relation to Steiner education in China. I have taken a transdisciplinary, dialectical approach, with a conceptual framework inspired by the notion of ‘Tao’ in which events are never thought of as occurring in isolation but embedded in a meaningful whole.

The research employed a two-sited ethnographic design, and I spent four months each at two Steiner schools in China in 2017. The data generation methods included interviews with parents and teachers and participant observations. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

I have examined the *push* and *pull* factors related to parents’ and teachers’ choices, the complexity and dilemmas in their experience of Steiner education, as well as how they conceptualised the relationship between Steiner education principles and traditional Chinese values. Guided by my conceptual framework, I have discussed the findings at both the micro

level, namely, parents' and teachers' decision-making and experiences related to Steiner education, and at the macro level, that is, educational context, society and values, including the dysfunction of mainstream education and the spiritual crisis in the wider materialism-oriented society in China. Steiner's focus on the organic unfolding of an individual's spirit appears to be in line with Taoist and Confucian thinking. I have argued that Steiner education offers a potential pathway for Chinese people to reconnect with aspects of their own traditional ways of being, which had become dis-embedded in the course of the modernisation process.

This project is an important piece of research for the understanding of parental school choice in China. It contributes to the under-researched field of alternative education and holistic education in China. This study is also of vital significance to Chinese education and its rediscovery and embracing of its own philosophical tradition.

*I dedicate this thesis to my two grandfathers: you shone light
on the path you walked...*

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I have attempted to translate everyone's words as faithfully as possible. Of course there are some phrases which are not directly translatable into English; in such cases I relied on my own interpretation, being guided by the spirit I felt present in your words. I have tried to remain as accurate as possible in my representations of the information, impressions, and insights that I obtained during my time at the schools, and I hope that any misunderstandings or misinterpretations on my part will be forgiven.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the Study

In the past decade, China has seen a major expansion of alternative education, an aspect of which is the 'Steiner Fever'¹, or the rapid growth of Steiner (Waldorf) education (Johnson, 2014). In China, the first Steiner school was opened in 2004 in Chengdu, capital of the south-western Sichuan province (Fussell, 2014). It is estimated that more than 400 kindergartens and 77 Steiner schools have been founded since 2005 in China (Shanhaiyuan, 2019). Many schools have reached capacity and a large number of families are still queuing to get in; some parents are even starting their own schools (Nylander, 2014).

The term 'Steiner Fever', which I heard used many times during my fieldwork, clearly contains a sensationalised element. I have, however, chosen to retain the use of the term throughout my thesis in order to creatively pursue the unconscious associations that the metaphor may contain in its organic usage within Steiner communities. The 'fever' has been spreading so fast that there have been many changes in the Chinese Steiner schools since I started this research in 2015. For example, as I was about to begin my fieldwork in December 2017, the unlicensed school where I would conduct my fieldwork had already split into two schools. At the time I am writing up this thesis, this unlicensed Steiner school has just obtained its licence and become legalised.

China's mainstream education system stresses early and intense academic development, regimentation, competition and standardised testing (Gu, 2010). Moreover, the pedagogy has been criticised across the Chinese society because it mainly relies on a teacher-centred approach, memorisation and cramming (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). In recent years, however, Chinese parents have been seeking alternatives, and the alternative education movement (see Section 3.1 for a detailed discussion), for example, the Steiner and Montessori models, as

¹ I take this term from its original expression as 'Waldorf Fever' coined by Zewu Li, one of the pioneers of the Steiner education movement in China, during 2012 Chengdu Xindu Chinese Language Conference on Steiner education (*Chengdu Xindu Huadefu Huawen Dahui*).

well as home schooling, have spread rapidly (Johnson, 2014; Kellum, 2013). Steiner education is not subject to the usual requirements of the Chinese state curriculum. This is not to suggest that Steiner schools are operating in complete isolation or independence from the Chinese state, but they are free to implement their own curricula.

1.1.1 Steiner education

The first Steiner School was established in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany. After World War 1, a German industrialist, Emile Molt, invited Steiner to create a school for the children of the workers at his Waldorf-Astoria factory. Concerned about the damage caused by the war, Molt asked Steiner to introduce a new approach to education, which would attend to the social, economic and political life of Europe. Upon Molt's request and using *anthroposophy* as a basis, Steiner developed the curriculum for the school. He then recruited and trained the teachers, and for several years supervised the operation of the school (Uhrmacher, 1995).

Today there are 1,182 Steiner schools in 66 countries, and 1,911 Steiner kindergartens spread across 69 countries (Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen, 2019). Steiner education has moved well beyond its European roots. Children in Peru, Namibia, Tajikistan and the Australian outback are all being educated in Steiner schools (Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners, 2014). China, in particular, is experiencing rapid growth, with new kindergartens or schools opening frequently ("China's Yuppies", 2017; James, 2014). Most Steiner Schools operate within the private sector, providing early childhood, elementary and secondary education. However, there are some public schools, mostly in Europe, that have adopted the Waldorf pedagogy for their education system. Steiner education is described as the largest independent school movement worldwide (Paull, 2011). This educational approach was, and perhaps still is, the fastest growing alternative educational model throughout the world (Angus & O'Connor, 2011).

1.1.2 Rudolf Steiner and *anthroposophy*

Steiner education is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), who was an Austrian philosopher, social reformer, literary scholar and architect. He founded *anthroposophy*, a quasi-spiritual underpinning for his life's work. *Anthroposophy* is often described as a movement; it can be usefully conceptualised as a lens through which Steiner

viewed all of his intellectual projects and developed them accordingly.

As a path of knowledge, *anthroposophy* can be understood as a means of guiding the spiritual in the human being (the particular) to the spiritual in the universe (the universal). Steiner considered *anthroposophists* to be those people who, as a necessity of life, feel the need to ask questions about the nature of the human being and the universe, just as one experiences hunger and thirst (Steiner, 1985). *Anthroposophy* aims to develop faculties of perceptive imagination, inspiration and intuition through the cultivation of a form of thinking independent of sensory experience (McDermott, 2009). As a pathway for living, *anthroposophy* has inspired many cultural innovations in education, agriculture, medicine, architecture, science and the arts, and much else (Ullrich, 2008). *Anthroposophy* does not consider politics to be within its remit and Steiner himself avoided any explicit political contributions. While Steiner's works and beliefs can be read politically, his thinking, however, tended towards a more transcendental realm, precluding politicising and sectarianism (Steiner, 1963).

1.1.3 Spirituality

Steiner education understands human beings as spiritual entities. To state the notion of spirituality in the most basic manner I can, would be to say that there remains something unknowable (in the conventional sense), yet significant, about the animating force of human consciousness. Steiner education in keeping with ideas found in *anthroposophy* essentially promotes the idea that the universal or spiritual element to existence, (whilst unknowable within the limited paradigm of reason), is accessible or 'feel-able' if human beings are able to develop their full range of faculties through education. Thus Steiner education is an implicitly spiritual quest. This notion of spiritual quest shares similarities with the Chinese '*Tao*', (道; a perfectly untranslatable term), which cannot be 'known' as an abstract thought but may be said to be *felt*. I found this definition of Taoism particularly fruitful:

[Taoism] refers to the way the universe hangs together in an ordered non-casual fashion, and, in response to that, the way in which humans should conduct themselves. (Pattison, 2000, p.203)

Over the course of history, the measurable human conditions have been largely subsumed under scientific disciplines. A view of existence which allows for spiritual perspectives, it could be said, gives space for the consideration of an unmeasurable (yet potentially graspable) aspect to the human condition. There is, of course, a lot more to be said on the subject of spirituality, and I will delve further into some related areas throughout the course of this thesis, especially in Chapters 10 and 11.

1.2 Personal Journey

My research interest stems from my personal experience. I grew up in a conformist, highly competitive and stressful, test-centred educational environment in China, and witnessed two of my high-school classmates commit suicide. Upon graduating, I fell into an investment-banking job at the age of 21. Feeling like a unit of economic production rather than a unique, valuable human being in need of social and cultural fulfilment, I decided to leave the job and explore the world and learn to ‘know’ myself. My travels have spanned almost 70 countries, including revisiting the great Silk Road from Turkey to China overland, and hitchhiking from China to the UK via Siberia. During my travels, I have gradually ‘de-educated’ and ‘re-educated’ myself through experiences on farms, in forests and at spiritual centres, staying with local people, and have also developed an interest in alternative education. I have compiled my experiences in a book published in China (Sun, 2014).

Speaking from my first-hand, albeit somewhat dated experience, I believe that the Chinese education system needs greater emphasis on emotional well-being and creativity, and a more holistic approach. Steiner education, as an alternative to mainstream education, promotes such aspects and has attracted my attention. By examining the current ‘Steiner Fever’ in China, I hope to develop a deeper understanding of this educational model and gain insights into this education phenomenon in China. By doing so, I hope to shed some light on what this ‘fever’ may be indicating in relation to the prospect of a ‘healthy and balanced’ education system in China.

1.3 The Current Research

1.3.1 Rationale for the current research

Taking my cue from the practice of Chinese medicine (in this instance, Western medicine is in agreement), the condition of a fever is not itself an illness, rather it is a sign the body is trying to heal itself. Within the frame of this metaphor, we can consider Chinese education to be the sick patient, and the extremely feverish rise of Steiner education, to be a symptom of a larger problem. Viewed in this way, we can consider Steiner education in China as a phenomenon that is trying to ‘tell’ something significant about the current state of Chinese education. The first aspect of this would be that in some sense it is a healthy system: a fever is a sign of health in the sense that it is the expected bodily response to illness, the sign that the body is reacting as it should. However, a feverish state must be revealed as reflecting something important for the patient. It is with this in mind that I have developed my overarching question: *What is at stake in the feverish manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?*

The focus on parents and teachers

The aim of this study is to investigate the broader social implications of the emergence and rapid rise of Steiner education in China. I have chosen to examine parents' and teachers' perspectives in relation to Steiner education in China, as they are the driving force behind the rise of Steiner education in China. They are responsible for setting up Steiner schools, becoming teachers at the schools, or choosing to send their children to the school. By engaging directly with parents and teachers, I felt that I could gain a great deal of insight in regard to the ‘Steiner Fever’ in China. Thus I decided to focus my time on interviewing parents and teachers, rather than students.

I do not, however, exclude students’ views and experiences in this study, they do of course form an important part of the whole picture, especially considering the fact that some of the older children may have a say in the school choice. My decision was made with the idea that the parent’s views would in many ways already be an incorporation of their child’s perspectives and experiences. During my 10-month fieldwork at the Steiner communities, I talked with many students informally and gained insights from them. In this way, their views

have influenced my findings implicitly.

Parent and teacher crossover

One of the unique aspects particular to Steiner education, as opposed to state education, is the degree of overlap between parents and teachers. The founding of most Steiner schools in China was driven by what is widely referred to among the Steiner communities in China as ‘the grass-roots mothers’ self-help movement’. Parental involvement in Steiner education, both in Steiner’s educational theory and in practice is considerable (see Section 3.3). Many Steiner parents in China go on later to become teachers at the Steiner school to which they have sent their children. Teachers at the schools in which I conducted my fieldwork often played a dual role: most of them were both teachers and parents. Their children were studying at the same school that they were working at. There were rarely teachers who would be against the idea of sending their own child to this Steiner school.

This close correlation between parents and teachers will no doubt give a different impression from that of educational studies looking at state schools in which parents and teachers are expected to be occupying very different roles. With this in mind, we are likely to see a greater degree of overlap and agreement between the perspectives of the teachers and parents; often they will be occupying both roles. Parents becoming teachers is rarely seen in the state education system or international schools in China. This, interestingly, presents a unique picture of the Steiner movement in China.

Literature review

There is a general lack of empirical research on alternative education in China. Among the limited research studies on Steiner education in China, most are theoretical, rather than empirical. With regard to the empirical literature that exists, it often lacks in-depth insights; few researchers have investigated parents’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences of Steiner education. The specific nature of the rapid rate at which Steiner education has been adopted in China remains until now unexamined. I will elaborate in greater detail on specific literature relating to alternative education and Steiner education in China in my Chapter 3 literature review.

In the current study I intended to investigate not only the reasons relating to parents' and teachers' choice of school, but also their perceptions and subsequent experiences of the school. I spent 10 months conducting ethnographic fieldwork at two Steiner schools in China, with the aim of capturing a more detailed picture of parents' and teachers' experiences of Steiner education (see my methodology in Chapter 4). This time period allowed me to develop closer relationships of trust with them than what would have otherwise been possible with a shorter research time frame. It also allowed me to gain deeper insights into their own reflective processes in relation to their original decisions to send their children to, or teach at, a Steiner school.

I also noted specific literature related to the relationship between Steiner education and ancient Chinese values. News articles (e.g. Matuszak, 2014), commenting on 'Steiner Fever', have suggested that Chinese people have seen in the Steiner system a reflection of their own culture in relation to the ideas of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies. The same article (Matuszak, 2014) notes that an alternative educational method known as *guoxue* (Chinese classical studies), emphasising art, Chinese calligraphy, music and the philosophies of Confucius, Mencius and Lao Tzu, dovetails with aspects of Steiner education. Furthermore, an article by Cherry (2014), who was one of the leaders in Steiner education movement in China, also points to the ties between Steiner education and traditional Confucian values. Wang (2018)'s PhD thesis offers a useful examination the theoretical parallels between *anthroposophy*, Steiner education and Buddhism, of which he found many. However, I could find no empirical study on how people view the relationship between Steiner education and traditional Chinese philosophies and values.

1.3.2 Research questions

Thus far, having reviewed the literature, I had established the contexts and rationale of my study. Three research questions were formed in order to accomplish the purpose of this study. These are as follows:

RQ1: What is the reasoning and decision-making process for parents and teachers in selecting Steiner education over mainstream education?

RQ2: What are parents' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of Steiner education?

What contradictions and dilemmas arise and how are these dealt with by parents and teachers?

RQ3: How do parents and teachers perceive the relationship between Steiner education principles and traditional Chinese values?

To understand the rationale for my third research question, it is important to acknowledge the spiritual aspect to both Steiner education and traditional Chinese values emanating from Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism (see Section 2.1.1 for the Chinese cultural context). Unlike my first two research questions, my third research question relating to parents' and teachers' perceptions of the relationship between Steiner education principles and traditional Chinese values was developed during my field research and solidified during my data analysis. What became apparent and increasingly interesting was the connection parents and teachers were making between their experience of Steiner education and their view of Chinese values. Often the similarities between the pedagogical approaches were pointed out; however, I noted that the terms and language used were particularly difficult to interpret. Terms, such as 'whole child', were used to describe a core Steiner educational value. Another phrase repeatedly echoed by parents was that of wanting their child to 'become who they are', a sentiment which bears a striking resemblance to the Taoist phrase *wu wei er zhi*². Many times, Taoism was mentioned by parents, comparing it to what they felt was the underlying philosophy of Steiner education.

1.3.3 Research approach

My aim was to take a dialectical approach, which saw the seeds of Steiner education in China as residing within the Chinese state education system. This dialectical approach led me to examine the *push* and *pull* factors relating to parents' choices, with the understanding that they were implicitly bound together. The explanation for this approach will be provided in Chapter 7. However, it is worth noting here, that I took my inspiration from the Taoist notion *Yin Yang* and the holistic practice of Chinese medicine, in which events are never thought of as occurring in isolation but are embedded in a meaningful whole (Nisbett, 2003).

² *Wu wei er zhi*, can be translated as 'doing nothing that goes against nature'. See section 10.1.1 for its relevance in relation to Steiner education.

The rise of Steiner education in China has been a grass-roots movement initiated by parents. However, I investigated this phenomenon in a way that went beyond (but did not exclude) parental school choice. I believe that, as a social phenomenon, 'Steiner Fever' does not exist in isolation: social, cultural and historical factors may also play a crucial part in contributing to the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon, for example, the dysfunction of mainstream education and the spiritual crisis in the wider materialism-oriented society. Understanding 'Steiner Fever' within the socio-historical, cultural and political contexts of China is an important feature of this study. Therefore this study employed a framework that encompassed both the micro, the individuals in the Steiner communities, as well as the macro, the cultural and socio-historical level, of the phenomenon. Additionally, this study has recognised the complexity of the micro and macro levels, as well as the interactions and interrelationships between the two.

This framework allows us to consider the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon beyond the narrow confines of parental school choice and decision-making or even the strong influences of family, peers, school and community. It compels us to expand our vision to recognise broader sociocultural, historical and global forces that are interacting at a macro level with the rise of Steiner education in China. Rather than examining how mental and psychological activities operate, on the one hand, and socio-historical and cultural contexts, on the other, I intend to view all of these aspects *paratactically*, that is, in a non-hierarchical and relational manner³.

1.3.4 Contributions to knowledge and practice

The present study makes simultaneous contributions to the under-researched field of alternative education in China (see Section 3.1) and empirical research on Steiner education (see Section 3.4). Additionally, the present study extends the literature on parental choice of Steiner education, in particular. This study provides insights into non-hegemonic, non-mainstream, alternative forms of education, that might be used to challenge the normative form of education in Chinese society. This study on 'Steiner Fever' in China may serve as a rich source of information about Chinese education in general. In understanding the reasons why some parents choose alternative education, the Chinese education

³ Parataxis roughly translates as 'arranging side by side', while hypotaxis translates as 'arranging under' (Hale, 2013). Parataxis is the main grammatical feature of Chinese sentences, while hypotaxis is the main grammatical feature of English (Dong & Ma, 2017).

administrators can better attend to the educational needs of students and parents. Therefore this research intends to provide meaningful insights not only into the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon, but also the alternative education movement in China, and it will provide implications for mainstream education as well.

1.3.5 My use of terminology

The schools following Steiner's system of education are interchangeably referred to as Steiner or Waldorf schools. For purposes of clarity, in this thesis, outside quotations, I use the term 'Steiner' school or education. When I refer to Steiner education or school in China, it may include preschool (kindergartens), primary school, lower secondary school and senior secondary school. I use the term 'Steiner parent' to refer to parents who at the time of my fieldwork in 2017 had a child enrolled at a Steiner school. Often, I use the term 'Steiner mother' or 'Steiner father', when it is helpful to be specific.

1.4 Taking a Transdisciplinary Perspective

This study adopted a transdisciplinary approach, transcending the scope of disciplinary worldviews to create a holistic approach, rather than situating itself in the disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology or philosophy. 'Trans' refers to “traverses and transgresses - between disciplinary order and undisciplined chaos” (Klein, 2014, p.172), and hence it applies to research efforts focused on problems that cross the boundaries of two or more disciplines.

Transdisciplinarity is distinct from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary because of its goal, namely, the understanding of the present world, which cannot be accomplished within the framework of disciplinary research (Nicolescu, 2006). I refer to the differences between multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinarity summarised by Nicolescu (2006), as presented in the table below.

	Definition and Explanation
Multidisciplinarity	Multidisciplinarity concerns itself with studying a research topic in not just one discipline but in several simultaneously. From this perspective, any topic will ultimately be enriched by incorporating the perspectives of several disciplines. The multidisciplinary approach overflows disciplinary boundaries while its goal remains limited to the framework of disciplinary research.
Interdisciplinarity	Interdisciplinarity has a different goal from multidisciplinarity. It concerns the transferring of methods from one discipline to another. Like multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity overflows the disciplines but its goal still remains within the framework of disciplinary research.
Transdisciplinarity	Transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines and beyond all disciplines. Its goal is an understanding of the present world, of which one imperative is unity of knowledge.

Table 1.1 Multidisciplinarity, Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinarity (adopted from Nicolescu, 2006)

The fluid nature of transdisciplinarity points to unity rather than fragmentation of knowledge, and is in line with my personal worldview. It proved a suitable approach to take in part due to the speculative nature of the study, which was researching a relatively new and fast-moving phenomenon in China about which there was very little existing literature. The very issue of ‘Steiner education in China’ immediately threw up ‘problems’ that could be considered, ‘trans’ -national, -disciplinary -epistemological, -ontological. An ethnographic study looking at how an early twentieth century German educational approach based on spiritual assumptions was making waves in twenty-first century China, a country with over 2,500 years of extremely rich philosophical and theological tradition, which today is described as being ‘Socialist with Chinese characteristics’, represented a panoply of blurred boundaries.

1.4.1 Division of the disciplines

There were no divisions of scholarship based on the nature of knowledge in China prior to the importation of Western ideas (Hu, 2006). After the Opium Wars, emulation of the Western educational system and its way of categorisation spread through China. The Rules for Colleges and Universities in 1903 divided academic subjects into disciplines (Gan, 2005). Many disciplines only developed under the paradigm of Western ones. For example, Chinese

philosophy as a discipline only developed under the paradigm of Western philosophy, because of the prevalent view in the early twentieth century of the superiority of the Western system of knowledge. With advanced military ideas, science, technology, and a wider dissemination of culture, Western systems of knowledge attained a 'universal' quality that relegated Chinese paradigms to being thought of as 'local particularities' (Gan, 2005).

What emerged from my time spent in the Steiner communities in China was just how much people there felt in tune with what Gan terms 'local particularities'. That is to say, people felt an affinity with a type of thinking in which philosophy is not considered a particular discipline of study, rather it is a type of embedded daily practice open to everyone. In fact, the feeling of most of the people I interviewed in the Steiner communities was that thinking philosophically about life was normal and healthy. Transdisciplinarity can be a useful approach to taking into account an experiential gap which can be created by the existence of a multiplicity of disciplines, which is to say that most people do act and think according to disciplines which are understood as "institutional forms for the generational transmission of intellectual practices" (Osborne, 2015, p.6).

Modern disciplines are often rooted in a worldview that does not acknowledge or have a methodology to deal with knowledge systems which might be situated outside the scientific. As articulated by Smith (2012),

Academic knowledges are organized around the idea of disciplines and fields of knowledge. These are deeply implicated in each other and share genealogical foundations in various classical and Enlightenment philosophies. Most of the 'traditional' disciplines are grounded in cultural world views which are either antagonistic to other belief systems or have no methodology for dealing with other knowledge systems. (p.65)

As Santos points out in relation to the ecological crisis, "Western thinking, whether critical or not, is grounded on the Cartesian idea that nature is *res extensa* and, as such, an unlimited resource unconditionally available to human beings" (Santos, 2016, p.23). Traditional Chinese culture has not made the same foundational divide between human beings and nature, that is to say, a conceptually autonomous notion of nature as separate from human beings has been traditionally an 'unthinkable' aspect of Chinese culture (Nisbett, 2003). How, therefore, can modern disciplines begin to make any sense of a concept such as Tao, which, as a term, is

not even grammatically 'housed' according to the usual conditions of language.

1.4.2 My transdisciplinary approach

A transdisciplinary approach may allow for a pathway back towards gaining an understanding of what Chinese thought might have been like prior to the emergence of the discipline understood as 'Chinese philosophy'. The discipline known as 'Chinese philosophy', implies something apart from the type of mundane, average thinking of a Chinese individual. Therefore the development of the discipline of 'Chinese philosophy' has contributed to the conceptual untying of the notion of 'thinking' and 'philosophising'. It is my contention that a transdisciplinary perspective allows for the possibility, at least imaginatively, for 'philosophy' and indeed, 'poetry', 'spirituality' and 'mysticism', to slip seamlessly back into what pertains to a generalised notion of what it means to be a 'thinking' being.

What a transdisciplinary approach implies is that the type of magpie eclecticism, which the term 'multidisciplinary' suggests, is not sufficient, which is to further suggest that there may be important contributions to this study which the very notion of the discipline cannot provide. The very idea of the discipline may be the obstacle, which it is necessary to overcome to provide a fuller picture of Steiner education in China, precisely because the examination of which requires a non-hierarchical appreciation of modes of thinking which are spiritual, poetic and can tolerate a notion such as the 'Tao'. Both Steiner education and Chinese traditional culture themselves could be loosely described as transdisciplinary in view of their holistic worldviews.

What the autonomous discipline provides in a notional sense is the ability to extract a concept from its embeddedness within life, in order to examine it better. From a Chinese episteme, the practice of autopsy might be considered the perfect condition that permits the removal of interrelated elements in order to study them, a physical impossibility made possible by the patients' death. I believe a central question for an ethnographic study contributing to the field of social sciences is 'How best to keep the study *alive*?', that is how to maintain the sense of the non-reducibility of the human condition in general. I consider my approach to be transdisciplinary to the extent that it keeps alive the notion of the non-disciplinary or the 'prior-to' -disciplinary; this will of course become central to providing even the most rudimentary understanding of Chinese ontology.

I adopted an ethnographic approach (which will be explained in Chapter 4), in order to investigate parents' and teachers' choices, perceptions and experiences of Steiner education in China. My role as a researcher is to 'listen' with a 'disinterested' ear; without attempting to bend my data one way or another, but rather to let the picture emerge on its own by allowing as much conceptual breadth as possible. This will entail an implicit awareness of differing epistemological positions that cannot necessarily be pitted directly against each other.

1.5 Organisation of Thesis

My thesis comprises 12 chapters. The next two chapters constitute the literature review section of this thesis. Chapter 2 lays out the socio-historical, cultural and political contexts of contemporary China, in which the current Chinese education system and recent educational reforms are situated. A picture of family life, parenting and parental choice of school in contemporary Chinese society is also provided. Chapter 3 describes what Steiner education entails, including its core principles, and contextualises Steiner education in the field of holistic education and alternative education. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology adopted for this study and my rationale for the chosen methodology. Building on this, Chapter 5 introduces methods I chose to generate and analyse data in this research.

Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 present the findings of my study. The order of these chapters roughly corresponds to each of the research questions, answering them in turn. Through each of the finding chapters my focus will spiral outwards: beginning with looking at parental choice of Steiner education, moving on to parental experiences and dilemmas, and finally into the wider Chinese cultural context and traditional values which lays the foundations for my discussion about the institutional paradigm gap in Chapter 11.

Chapter 6 provides the ethnographic accounts of the local contexts of the two particular Steiner schools, on which the present thesis focuses. I then examine the reasoning employed by parents and teachers in selecting Steiner education in Chapter 7 and their decision-making process in Chapter 8. In Chapter 9, I explore the life of parents and teachers that they have experienced after joining a Steiner school, and the contradictions and dilemmas that have arisen in their experience of Steiner education. In Chapter 10, I investigate parents' and teachers' conceptualisation of Steiner education in relation to traditional Chinese values.

In the final part of my thesis, Chapter 11 discusses the main findings of this study and presents my theoretical development. Chapter 12 evaluates this study, discussing its limitations, as well as its contributions to knowledge and implications for policy-makers and educational practitioners.

Chapter 2 Education and Parenting in China

Chapters 2 and 3 will review relevant literature associated with the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon in China. The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise my research, namely, how Steiner education is situated within the socio-historical, cultural and political contexts as well as the educational context of contemporary China; at the same time, parenting, family life and parental choice of school in contemporary China is discussed. This can provide us with a broad perspective at both macro and micro levels from which to examine the two specific Steiner schools at the heart of this study.

In this chapter, firstly I review the historical, cultural and political contexts of contemporary China. After that, I provide an overview of education in China today, including a brief post-1949 modern history of China's national education system (Section 2.2) and the education reforms of the recent decades (Section 2.3). In Section 2.4, I aim to provide a picture of parenting in a family in contemporary Chinese society. Lastly, I will examine literature on parental choice of school.

Conducting literature review

The process of mapping the literature was conducted mainly in English. This included a keyword search through the Cambridge University Faculty of Education Library homepage to search for journal articles, research studies and reference books using databases, such as the British Education Index and ERIC⁴. I also utilised my background as a Mandarin Chinese speaker to conduct a literature search on Steiner education in Mandarin Chinese. The literature in Chinese was searched via the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database using key words, such as '*hua de fu*' (Steiner Education). This more comprehensive

⁴ The search included, but was not limited to, the following terms in basic and advanced search engines: (a) 'Chinese education', 'education system in China', 'educational reforms in China'; (b) 'China's modern history', 'Chinese culture'; (c) 'school choice', 'parental choice of school', 'school choice in China'; (d) 'alternative education', 'alternative schools', 'alternative education in China'; (e) 'holistic education', 'holistic education in China'; and (f) 'Steiner education', 'Waldorf education', 'Steiner education in China'.

review provides me with greater insights into the primary areas of discussion that are relevant to the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon in China, and expands the research beyond the English-speaking world.

2.1 Socio-Historical and Cultural Contextualisation of Education in China

This section provides contextualisation for the socio-historical and cultural conditions in which the education system and the rise of Steiner education in contemporary China is embedded. This includes a brief introduction to the tripartite influence of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. My aim in this section is not to provide a detailed analysis of any period of China's history, rather to provide some important background information, which will help shed some light on the role that Steiner education may be playing within contemporary China.

2.1.1 Cultural contextualisation

Chinese traditional values relates to a traditional culture, which is given the label 'traditional' by virtue of its relationship to subsequent historical developments which led China to adopt aspects of Western culture in the course of its modernisation process. Therefore Chinese traditional values relate to a set of social relations formed by Chinese culture prior to it being lost as the dominant Chinese paradigm (discussed in Section 2.1). This loss of traditional values also has epistemological and ontological implications. The closeness of philosophy and theology within Chinese daily life as orienting systems were so embedded that they were taken for granted.

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism constitute the essence of traditional Chinese culture; the relationship between the three has been marked by both contention and complementation in history. These three cultural expressions are summed up by Koller (2016) as three ways of attaining the self-transformation and perfection of human beings: the Taoist way that involves following the Inner Way (*Tao*) of Nature, the Confucian way that requires the cultivation of human nature and the social virtues, and the Buddhist way that takes place through gaining meditative insight into the mind.

The tree of Chinese cultural life appears to have been planted in particularly rich and fertile philosophical and theological soil, which has experienced some erosion in recent times. The cultural shocks which were precipitated by the Chinese modernisation process, of which Maoism can be viewed as a part, greatly threatened much of what up until that point had been so deeply embedded within Chinese culture as to be simply taken for granted. Chan (1963) eloquently notes the importance of Taoism in everyday life: "No one can hope to understand Chinese philosophy, religion, government, art medicine - or even cooking without a real appreciation of the profound philosophy taught in this little book [of *Tao Te Ching*]" (p.136).

The Confucian influence on Chinese society

As the most famous educator and theorist in Chinese history, Confucius (551 - 479 BC) has had a permanent impact on Chinese society as well as on Chinese education. In his lifetime, Confucius taught over 3,000 students and developed rich educational thought that still influences educational practice in China today (Lin, 1999). During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770-221 BC) the classic works, namely the Four Books and the Five Classics⁵, became the cardinal texts that one had to learn in order to understand the authentic thought of Confucianism. Before Confucius, only children from elite families and the nobility had the right to receive education, which was the route to becoming government officials. From the time of Confucius, however, education started to become available to the general public in Chinese society.

In Confucianism, self-cultivation of morality and personal development can be achieved through education (Sheng, 2018). In this way, Confucius advocates the importance of education, which is the foundation of a stable and prosperous country. For example, according to the work of *Xue Ji*, which is the first educational monograph produced in China and written by Confucianists, education should be seen as a top priority when building a country and managing public affairs. A popular Confucian saying, with respect to education, has been, 'If you achieve excellent academic performance, you can become an official' (*xue er you ze shi*). This, to some extent, has become a dominant ideological view of education, even in contemporary China. The prospect of obtaining an official government position

⁵ The Four Books and the Five Classics refer to *Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Analects*, and *Mencius*; *Classic of Poetry*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites*, *I Ching*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

remains a popular and sought after goal for Chinese students despite the increasing diversity of opportunities for other viable and respected career goals. Chinese parents' attitudes towards their children's education, consequently, have embodied this Confucian idea, and thus they are eager to heavily invest in their children's education.

Confucian modes of cultivation and education included physical, musical, ritual, intellectual and moral training. Throughout the imperial period, the study of Confucian classics was regarded as ensuring a holistic development of individuals, not only the intellectual, but also moral and social. The close relationship between country and an individual's morality is central to Confucius's teaching (see *The Great Learning*). As a famous Chinese saying states, in the rise and fall of the world, every person has a responsibility (*tian xia xing wang, pi fu you ze*). The cultivation of a person's morality will lead to the good regulation of the family, and a well-regulated and harmonious family can lead to the stability and prosperity of the country.

Taoism and Buddhism in Chinese thought

The origin of Taoism (Daoism) can be traced back to the late fourth century B.C. and the main thinkers representative of this teaching are *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. The basis of Taoist philosophy is the idea of '*wu wei*', often translated as 'non-doing', and in practice it refers to a state of 'being'. Key teachings in Taoism are *Tao* (the way), along with a stress on balance, harmony, and the interdependence of everything in nature. Taoist thinking is dialectical, and one central idea in Taoism is that any extreme action can initiate a counteraction of equal extremity. For example, the *Yin/Yang* symbol shows that there are two sides to everything: within the *Yang* there exists the *Yin* and vice versa. Another central idea in Taoism is that human beings are not considered to be separate from heaven and earth, but rather they play an integral role and containing a microcosm of the universe within them. "The Quintessential Spirit is what we receive from Heaven; the physical body is what we are given by Earth" (Roth, 2010, p.241).

Buddhism, on the other hand, is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, and originated in ancient India as a Sramana tradition some time between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C., spreading through much of Asia, including China. In general it is believed by Chinese people that Buddhism first came to China in the first century during the Han

dynasty, through missionaries from India. After a few centuries of assimilation, Buddhism became localised. At times in Chinese history, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were blended. In the Buddhist teaching, human life is full of suffering, yet through practice of mastering of mind, gaining wisdom and attaining enlightenment one can overcome all suffering. Overall, Buddhism has played a very important role in Chinese culture, at both the philosophical level and in the practices of daily life.

The three ancient practices have each played a foundational role in the development of Chinese culture, with varying degrees of influence and significance during differing dynasties. As Nisbett (2003) has noted,

The Chinese orientation toward life was shaped by the blending of three different philosophies: Taoism, Confucianism, and, much later, Buddhism. Each philosophy emphasized harmony and largely discouraged abstract speculation. [...] The principle of yin-yang is the expression of the relationship that exists between opposing but interpenetrating forces that may complete one another, make each comprehensible, or create the conditions for altering one into the other. (p.13)

To summarise, in this section, I have introduced the tripartite influence of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism on Chinese society and education. In the section that follows, I will outline the historical contextualisation of the current study.

2.1.2 Historical contextualisation

In this section I provide some relevant historical information regarding what is generally understood as China's modernisation process. This section is not an attempt to present a comprehensive historical picture, rather it aims at focusing on some of the main dialectal swings of recent history.

This modernisation process can be understood as a concerted effort by the ruling powers within China to provide technological, economic and social reform generally aimed at bringing China's development in line with the progress it considered to have taken place in the West. There are many complex and interconnecting features of the modernisation process of which countless books and studies will only ever paint a partial picture, being after all an

essentially human story, not merely one of charting technological progress. The psychological effects of the modernisation process necessarily remain almost impossible to gauge, affecting as it did billions of individuals. We can, however, attempt to draw out some of the main aspects, with the aim of better understanding the current state of Chinese social progress in relation to education. After all, many of the parents to whom I have spoken to during my data collection will have been affected, either directly or indirectly, by the events of the Cultural Revolution⁶.

After the Opium wars, traditional Chinese culture, such as Confucianism, was viewed as a hindrance to modernisation. What is clear is that China looked towards the West in its quest to modernise and, in doing so, underwent some of the sociocultural changes that are indicative of modernity as laid out Foucault (1977) such as rejection of tradition, the prioritisation of individualism, faith in scientific and technological progress, rationalisation and professionalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation. Foucault of course refers to Western modernity, the Chinese context is somewhat more difficult to categorise due its lack of representative democracy and indeed the economic and social policies of the Chinese government, 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' (Deng, 1982). Indeed, Kipnis (2015) warns against an overreliance on the modernisation theory when it comes to understanding contemporary China, arguing that presenting a too-sharp divide between tradition and modernity, may create an unhelpfully simple dualism.

1860-1945: the start of China's modernisation process

The start of China's modernisation process, I want to suggest, effectively begins with the realisation that its status was relatively 'unmodern', the catalyst for which was China's defeat to Great Britain in Opium war in 1860 (Schoppa, 2011). Western technology emanating out of a blossoming capitalist economy served to recast the largely rural peasant community of China as backward and underdeveloped. The defeat in the Opium war heralded the *Self-Strengthening Movement* (1861-1895), also known as the *Tongzhi Reforms* or *Western*

⁶ The Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement in the People's Republic of China running from 1966 until 1976. Launched by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China, its stated goal was to preserve Chinese Communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to reimpose Maoism as the dominant ideology of the Party. The movement paralysed China politically and economically, and killed an estimated 500,000 to 2,000,000 people (Tsou, 1986).

Affairs Movement, which oversaw the adoption and development of Western military-style technologies (Palm, 2012). In 1898, as a result, a series of reforms was enacted in an attempt to establish a modern school system. In the early twentieth century, China then started to gear itself up for the adoption of a global, knowledge-based and information-based economy (Li, 2016). The *Xinhai* Revolution in 1911 saw the overthrow of China's last imperial dynasty, ending 2000 years of monarchy and heralding the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC) that lasted from 1912-1949 (Li, 2016).

1949-1978: the Maoist era

The Civil War (1940–1949) ended with the revolutionary victory of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China. Chairman Mao sought to modernise China with a series of five-year plans inspired by those of the Soviet Union. Mao's aim for China was to become a world power without foreign, (mainly Western,) involvement, or capitalism and preached the idea of self-reliance (Schoppa, 2011). Mao's second five-year plan in 1958, known as the Great Leap Forward, focused heavily on the collectivisation of Chinese society and on merging small agriculture collectives into much larger 'peoples communes' (Duara, 1974). The Maoist era, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) saw a radical break with Confucian values, specifically the authority of the familial structure. This period of cultural revolution sparked a reversal of the old hierarchy, in which young people were encouraged to tear down the past, denounce cultural relics and attack their elders as a process of delegitimising all forms of authority (state authority being the obvious exception) (Žižek, 2011).

1978-Present: the Opening-Up policy and rehabilitation of Confucianism

The Opening-Up policy initiated in 1978 saw dramatic economic shifts within China. This period saw an unprecedented acceleration of modernisation. China maintained an authoritarian 'Communist' government but transitioned toward market capitalism (Yan, 2010). During this era China has risen to the position of a global superpower: since China's economic reforms in 1978, its annual GDP per capita growth rate has been steady at around 9 percent (Garnaut, Song, & Fang, 2018).

To summarise this section, during China's quest to modernise the pendulum of history has swung to differing ends in a dialectical fashion. The seeds of each era can be understood to have been planted in the extremes of the previous era. As the philosopher Žižek (2009) has noted, "The supreme irony of history is thus that it was Mao himself who created the ideological conditions for rapid development of capitalism in China by tearing apart the fabric of traditional society" (p.133). The speed with which Mao attempted to eradicate 2,500 years of theological and philosophical life in China has arguably left China somewhat morally and spiritually disconnected to its past (Yan, 2011).

What remains unclear, however, is which aspects of Chinese spiritual and cultural life have survived the Maoist era in their unshakeability. The role of ancient Chinese values at an institutional level is relatively easy to discern; one can interpret them through economic and social policies. However, it remains far more difficult to untangle the motivations and drives at an individual level, to the extent that individual human needs often remain unknown even to the person who is subject to them. As human beings we remain mysterious, even to ourselves; our deep-seated needs and desires remain suppressed beneath complex layers of emotional and social influence.

2.1.3 Political and social contextualisation

The political and social contexts of education in contemporary China are rather unique. In the process of more than 30 years of political and economic reforms, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has incorporated a capitalist economy with a socialist authoritarian form of governance, which, according to the anthropologist Pieke, can be best understood as a kind of 'neo-socialism' (Pieke, 2009). Pieke also argues:

It has become increasingly clear [since the late 1990s] that the weakening of the Chinese party-state has not happened. Capitalizing on rapidly rising prosperity and continued economic growth, the party-state has reinvented itself, putting the rule of the CCP on an increasingly solid footing both materially and organizationally, and, increasingly ideologically. (2009, p.4)

This form of governance has been achieved as a result of the successful employment of a range of techniques through which Chinese citizens have appeared to accept and internalise

the elements of a neo-liberalist political reasoning that is based on "both economic (efficiency) and ethical (self-responsibility) claims" (Ong, 2006, p.11). The state education system, in this context, attempts in principle to cultivate learned and skilled citizens who can adapt to the requirements of the state and the market (Hoffman, 2010).

Since the implementation of market-oriented reforms in 1978, Chinese society has been in a process of transition from a planned and centrally controlled economy to a market economy (Bian, 2002). This transition, which has taken place over the past three decades, has involved radical changes in China's economy as well as its social structure (Lu, 2001). For example, the class stratification in China has been transformed from a rigid classification based on status in the Mao period, to an open, evolving multiple-class system in the post-Mao period (Bian, 2002). In the Mao era, the middle class was mainly composed of officials, intellectuals and workers in the state-owned enterprises, whilst after this transition following market-oriented reforms, Chinese sociologists have recognised that a new middle class has started to emerge (Li, 2000).

A wealth of research literature has emerged that focuses on the definition of the Chinese middle class (*zhong chan jie ceng*) (Goodman, 2016; Guo, 2008; Li, 2005). Li (2005) argues that the middle class in China is composed of Party and government officials, managers of enterprises, private entrepreneurs, professionals and technocrats.

The middle class in contemporary China do not conform to the typical image of their middle-class counterparts in the highly stratified societies of the West in terms of, for example, a stable lifestyle, mainstream values and active political participation (Wright, 1997). Instead, as a transitional society, the social structure in contemporary China is seen to be fluid and unstable, with a high degree of social mobility (Bian, 2002). Guo (2002) and Yang (2003) found that education could be regarded as a key factor in social mobility, particularly in this Chinese transitional society. The variation in educational attainment is strongly associated with an individual's social status (Li, 2005). Thus families attempt to facilitate their children's success at school by providing them with more cultural capital (Sheng, 2014).

2.2 Education in China

This section seeks to provide an overview of education in China with a focus on the contemporary education in which the rise of Steiner education is embedded. This includes a brief post-1949 contextualisation of China's national education system, the current education system, as well as the privatisation of education in the recent decades.

2.2.1 Post-1949 modern history of Chinese education

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese education has experienced bold moves, major shifts and reversals (Tsang, 2000). In the first 15 years of the new China (1949-1954), the young Communist government used various strategies to bring basic education to the mass of the population in order to prepare a 'governing elite' through provision of higher education. Heavily influenced by the Soviet Union's model of development, China adopted a curriculum focused on science and technology in primary education (Tsang, 2000).

The eruption of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), however, dramatically disrupted earlier progress. Higher education was halted, and preparing cadres with Communist ideals became the primary goal of education at all levels. The curriculum was reconstituted, with subjects such as physics, chemistry, history, geography and literature replaced by courses in industrial skills and other practical matters. A rising generation of graduate students, academics, technicians, professionals and teachers was lost (Chen, 2001). Ironically, there were also gains: primary education was provided for large numbers of school-age children and the issue of illiteracy was addressed successfully (Surowski, 2000).

After the Mao era, in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping became the national leader and initiated the Reform and Opening-Up (see Section 2.1), the development of higher education was resumed. National leaders in China perceived education as integral to economic development, as advocated by Deng Xiaoping, and education needed to be oriented toward modernisation, the world and the future (Goldman, Kumar, & Liu, 2008). At the same time, the flourishing of the market economy affected China's educational development, and a market-oriented approach emerged in the educational sphere. The state's call for decentralisation and diversification of educational services has created ample room for the growth of private

education. As a result, many private schools and colleges have become more popular, which has challenged the conventional public and private boundaries in the Chinese education sector (Mok & Wat, 1998; Wu, 2013). I will expand on this further in Section 2.2.3. In Table 2.1, I briefly summarise the post-1949 modern history of Chinese education based on what I have laid out in this section.

Period	Development of Education
1949 to mid-1960s	A curriculum focused on science and technology in primary education
Mid-1960s to late-1970s	Higher education halted; Primary education expanded in terms of size.
Late-1970s to the present	Higher education resumed and expanded; Education sector decentralised and diversified; Private education has become more popular.

Table 2.1 Post-1949 Modern History of Education in China

2.2.2 Current education system in China

Today China has the largest education system in the world. There are almost 260 million students and over 15 million teachers in about 514,000 schools, excluding graduate education institutions (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014). Education is state-run, and county-level governments have primary responsibility of the governing and delivery of school education. In recent years, the responsibility of the Ministry of Education has shifted from direct control to macro-level monitoring of the education system, and it also steers education reforms via laws, plans, budget allocation, information services, policy guidance and administrative means (National Centre for Education Development Research, 2008). The current structure of the Chinese education system is illustrated in the table below (Table 2.2).

Age	Schooling	
27	22	PhD programme
26	21	
25	20	
24	19	Master's programme
23	18	
22	17	
21	16	University (bachelor's degree) and vocational college
20	15	
19	14	
18	13	
17	12	Senior secondary school
16	11	
15	10	
14	9	Junior secondary school
13	8	
12	7	
11	6	Primary school
10	5	
9	4	
8	3	
7	2	
6	1	
5		Pre-school and kindergarten
4		
3		

Table 2.2 China's Education System Organisation (Source: OECD, 2016)

In China, students usually enrol in preschool at age 2 or 3, and leave preschool at the age of 6. Preschool education is not compulsory, and many preschools are privately owned. At the primary and secondary education levels, this education system requires all citizens to attend school for at least nine years, and it is known as the nine-year compulsory education. This encompasses six years of primary education (ages 6 to 11) and three years of lower secondary (junior secondary school, ages 12 to 14). By law, all students in compulsory education are exempted from tuition and miscellaneous fees.

Upon completion of the lower secondary school, students undertake a public examination (called *Zhongkao*) to enter upper secondary schools (senior secondary, ages 15 to 17). There are five types of upper secondary schools in China: general senior secondary, technical or specialised secondary, adult secondary, vocational secondary and craft schools. The last four are referred to as secondary vocational schools. The government uses the examination results from the *Zhongkao* to assign students to different senior secondary schools.

At the tertiary level, most colleges and universities offer four-year bachelor's degrees. Entry to higher education in China is highly competitive. If students cannot gain admission to colleges or universities, they can alternatively study for a two- or three-year associate degree in some vocational-technical college or other forms of higher education institution (Zhou & Zhu, 2007). Graduate study in China is comprised of two stages: a two-or-three-year master's level and a three-year doctoral level.

2.2.3 Marketisation and privatisation of education in China

China has a long history of private education. The first private school was founded 2,500 years ago by the great philosopher Confucius. Until the early twentieth century, virtually all schooling in China was private. However, since 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party took power, up to the early 1980s, private schools disappeared throughout the country. Under the communist government, educational policy-making, curriculum design and teaching, school finance, and personnel management were all centrally controlled (Lin, 1999).

Since the Opening-Up policy to modernise in China in the late 1970s, education policy has been undergoing a great transformation. The pursuit of rapid growth in a globalised economy and these market-oriented reforms have significantly influenced education policy and development in China. Aligned with the development of the market-oriented economy and its increasing integration with the global market, a more pragmatic view of education has gradually taken shape in the post-Mao era. This has resulted in the decentralisation and marketisation of education as a consequence (Ngok, 2007), and the resurfacing of private schools. The first 'Law on Promotion of Private Education' came into effect on September 1, 2003, and private schools can claim the same legal status as public schools. By 2008, there were more than a 100,000 private schools at all levels of education (Mok, Wong, & Zhang 2009). This increase in private schools, ranging from rural vocational to urban foreign language schools, exemplifies how the government has diversified and decentralised its financing of education (Hansen, 2015).

Some researchers have argued that the privatisation of education has become a global phenomenon over the last two decades (see Ball, 2009; Guo & Guo, 2016). The privatisation of education can be defined as a state-sponsored institutional process of 'untying' whereby, as Yan (2010) argues, the state retreats from the monopoly of all educational affairs but "force[s]

individuals to shoulder more responsibility, to more actively engage in market-based competition, and to assume more risks" (p.499). This shift away from a state monopoly of education may well be welcomed by some parents, who consider it as a furthering of their personal freedom to make independent choices about their child's future. However, if considered in relation to neo-liberal tendencies, these policies may also signify a weakening and undermining of a society's institutions. Privatisation may initially appear to offer unprecedented freedoms when compared to the dominating control of Chinese state institutions; however, a key issue for consideration is the manner in which education is increasingly run as a form of business.

2.2.4 The influence of the *Gaokao* (National College Entrance Examinations)

A key feature associated with the current education system in China is the National College Entrance Examinations, commonly known as the *Gaokao* among Chinese people. Admissions to undergraduate programmes are based on students' *Gaokao* scores. A few exceptional cases are considered without the examination results. Since a college degree is required for virtually all government positions, and also accords social status, the *Gaokao* is perceived as determining the course of a student's life (Zhao, 2012). This section discusses the influence of the *Gaokao* on the current education system in China.

The *Gaokao* was established by the Ministry of Education in 1952 and was designed to select senior secondary school graduates for higher education (Feng, 1999). This examination system is deeply rooted in Chinese history, originating with the imperial civil service examinations designed to support the spread of central control and political centralisation over a vast land (Asia Society, 2005; Feng, 1999). From the seventh century until 1905, examinations were used as the sole criterion for selection of officials for the Chinese civil service. Hundreds of scholars from all over the country gathered every three years in the capital for the examination, which normally lasted one to two weeks. For scholars and their families, the opportunity to take these examinations was probably the most significant event in their lives.

Since its establishment, the *Gaokao* has largely directed the nation's education. The preparation guidelines provided by the Examinations Committee have oriented the curriculum in all senior secondary schools across the country (Feng, 1999; Gu, 2010).

Sample *Gaokao* tests have flooded school campuses (Feng, 1999). School has become the training ground for the examination system, and learning has become a simple, monotonous practice session to enable students to answer test questions at both primary and secondary education levels (Gu, 2010). As a result, students lose interest in, and curiosity about, exploring anything beyond the set curriculum (Niu & Sternberg, 2003).

At the same time, the quality of a senior secondary school is judged by the number of its graduates who have survived the *Gaokao* and successfully entered universities. The 'good quality' schools have been ranked as 'key' schools and are given additional financial support by the government. Consequently, key junior secondary schools and key primary schools, as well as key kindergartens, have emerged (Feng, 1999). As a result, parents put enormous effort into enrolling their offspring in the key kindergartens and schools to ensure that their children can succeed in the *Gaokao* and enter top universities and colleges (Feng, 1999).

There are several issues associated with the *Gaokao*: firstly, it is a significant factor that causes students to work hard and achieve; it also places tremendous, unrelenting stress on students and teachers (Asia Society, 2005). Additionally, a consequence of the *Gaokao* is that too much emphasis is placed on memorisation of obscure facts instead of acquisition of useful, applicable skills and knowledge, as well as on economic and state-centric thinking. Modern educators in China have been looking for a way to address students' lack of creativity, the overemphasis on testing, the focus on memorisation over application, and the disconnection between school learning and real-life situations (Asia Society, 2005).

2.3 Educational Reforms and the *Suzhi* Reform in China

In this section, I will lay out the educational reforms what have been implemented in the Chinese education system in recent decades. Scholars in China have long debated the pros and cons of the current education system and its examination regime. The *Gaokao* system has been under fierce attack from the public for pushing the Chinese educational system to produce "deadly knowledge and meek test-takers" (Wu, 2016, p.730). Parents, school leaders, teachers and scholars started to strongly criticise the *Gaokao* for burdening students, schools, and families to solely in pursuit of high marks and failing to prepare Chinese citizens for global competition (Wu, 2016; Yi, 2011).

At the same time, as is in the case of other nations across East Asia, it is argued that examination-oriented teaching practices cause "passivity, lack of capacity to apply knowledge to practice, low levels of educational engagement, and a lack of well-roundedness" in students, all of which are undesirable characteristics (Sargent, 2011, p.50). Media and scholarly publications, addressing this anxiety, have been calling for 'creativity' outlets for children, homework reduction, extracurricular activities, and fewer demands to imitate and memorise (Kipnis, 2011). The imitation-based, examination-oriented, and teacher-centred educational system has become a target of intense criticism in the mainstream because of its inability to produce a 'modern', liberal, entrepreneurial citizenry, whereas "open-ended, child-centred, non-authoritarian pedagogical approaches are upheld as the pre-conditions to improving the quality of life of Chinese citizens and the country's global competitiveness" (Wu, 2016, p.730).

Since the early 1980s, alongside the rapid economic growth and comprehensive social transformation, China's education system has undergone continuous reform. From expansion of access to promotion of quality education as a core value, the government has regularly adjusted and advanced education policy to make the system compatible with the country's social and economic development, as well as new education needs and trends (OECD, 2016). However, many Chinese people, including teachers and parents, are frustrated with and disillusioned by the fate of educational reforms, such as those designed to promote 'quality education' (*suzhi jiaoyu*) or 'reduce the burden' (*jianfu*) of homework on students. Many teachers argue that when a rigid examination system is the major driving factor, reforms are destined to fail (Hansen, 2015). This discontent and frustration with the failed attempts to reform the education system were also reflected in increasingly negative views of state education among urban parents, as demonstrated in a Chinese survey released in 2011 (Twenty-First-Century Educational Research Institute, 2011).

2.3.1 The *suzhi* education movement

In this section, I will discuss the transition of Chinese education from examination-oriented to quality-oriented in recent decades as well as addressing the association with the wider discourse of *suzhi* (素质; quality).

The *suzhi jiaoyu* movement (*su zhi jiao yu gai ge*), 'education for quality reforms', is the most recent iteration of an old debate, going back to the late nineteenth century (as discussed in Section 2.1.2), over how to modernise education against a historically entrenched tendency to privilege rote-learning. *Suzhi*, with no exact equivalent in English and inadequately translated as 'quality' (Murphy, 2004), has become a buzzword, an indefinable yet enduring word.

As a reaction to the increasing global competition driven by a knowledge-based economy and a longstanding public concern that the examination-oriented educational system has been perpetuating "rote learning at the expense of practicality, plurality and innovativeness of education", the *suzhi jiaoyu* movement has been implemented to improve students' overall human quality (Yi, 2011, p.318). At the same time, the *suzhi jiaoyu* movement occupies a significant position in the post-Mao era goals for modernisation; it is viewed as the project that aims to bring China to her rightful place among the world's most powerful nations (Kuan, 2015)⁷.

The phrase *suzhi jiaoyu* first appeared in an official document in 1999 in the *Action Plan for the Vigorous Development of Twenty-First-Century Education* (State Council, 1999), in which *suzhi jiaoyu* was promoted as one of its main goals. A section on education in the ten-year development plan entitled *Outline for the Development of Children in China, 2001-2010*, promotes *suzhi jiaoyu* and the holistic development of students, as well as their consciousness for innovation, practical ability and scientific spirit (State Council, 2003).

The term *suzhi*, which is part of the *suzhi* discourse, however, arose long before *suzhi jiaoyu* (education). The rise of *suzhi* discourse during the post-Mao era is tied in with a series of political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic events, including the implementation of the birth control policy, the return of competition to the education system and job markets, and the centrality of nationalism to the Party's self-legitimation (Kipnis, 2006). In the early 1980s, *suzhi* appeared in the context of post-Mao eugenics slogans, such as Superior Birth

⁷ As a guidebook on curriculum reform claims: "China is an ancient civilisation with a long history. It has made an indelible, universally recognised contribution to the development of human civilisation. Even so, since the beginning of the Opium War in 1840, the development of our country has fallen behind that of the developed nations everywhere in the world for various kinds of complicated reasons. To a developing nation like ours, this curriculum reform has a profound meaning for the revitalisation of the Chinese race." (Zhu, 2002, p.5-6)

and Nurture (*yousheng youyu*). This was in support of the One-Child Policy designed to persuade parents to bring up a high-*suzhi* single child by ensuring that all the limited social and family resources were invested solely in him/her, instead of raising several children with low *suzhi* as a result of the few resources available for each of them (Yan, 2003). Under the regime of developmentalism, it was regarded vital for Chinese people who possess *suzhi* to be cultured, creative and competitive so that they would produce economic value for the nation and would understand "the responsibilities, obligations, claims, and rights that connect members of society to the state" (Jacka, 2009, p.524). As put forward by Deng Xiaoping, the national leader for the market reform:

The national strength and the stamina of economic development more and more depends on the *suzhi* of the labourers. (Zeng, 1989, p.165)

Since then, there has been increasingly significant public interest in the cultivation of a generation of high *suzhi*, or high-human-quality, citizens "who will be able to deal with the challenges of the modern world" (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005, p.44). *Suzhi* discourse was then found in domains as disparate as rural development, domestic migration, private business, and corporate culture. *Suzhi* education rhetoric furthered these trends (Kipnis, 2006). In the State Council's *1990s Programme Outline for the Development of Children in China*, *suzhi* appears a number of times, as in the first sentence of the document: "The children of today are the subjects of the twenty-first century, and the survival, protection, and development of children are the foundation for raising population *suzhi*" (1992, p.1).

However, surviving academic competition eventually trumps all other considerations due to the influence of the *Gaokao*, and *suzhi* reform has not lived up to people's expectations of policy-makers, educators and parents. Not only does China's examination-centred education system remain firmly in place, but also competition within this system has intensified (see Guo & Guo, 2016; Hansen, 2015; Kipnis, 2011; Yi, 2011). Many Chinese people insist that measuring students by examination results is still the fairest method, given the country's population size, in a culture in which advancement is too commonly attained by currying favour. Moreover, historical and economic factors have intensified the requirement to compete, as the expansion of higher education following the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s produced more college graduates than could be absorbed by the economy. Parents felt extremely pressured by academic inflation, seeing how competitive entry-level positions in

their own industries had become (Kuan, 2015).

2.3.2 Recent policies on education reforms

Other than the *suzhi jiaoyu* movement, there have also been other recent education reforms, which have placed an emphasis on eradicating illiteracy, accelerating the development of preschool education, universalising nine-year compulsory education, improving the quality of compulsory education and reforming the *Gaokao* (OECD, 2016). One major educational reform of primary schools aiming at improving the curriculum, textbooks, teaching methodologies and the assessment system, with a stronger focus on creativity and holistic development of students, has been carried out in China since 2001 (OECD, 2016).

The New Curriculum Reform entered the stage of implementation in 2001 in 38 areas and by 2005 all schools nationwide were studying the new curricula (Yin, 2013). According to the *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline*, the aim is to promote all-round development of students, and the primary school curriculum should consist of courses that encourage all-round, holistic development of individual learners (Ministry of Education, 2001). The new system shows a departure from the former system that only took account of students' academic grades, and relies on diverse criteria for student outcomes that change the examination-oriented mode of study (OECD, 2016). Six objectives are specified in the reform outline, which is illustrated in Table 2.3 (OECD, 2016).

1	Change from a narrow perspective of knowledge transmission in classroom instruction to a perspective concerned with learning how to learn and developing positive attitudes.
2	Change from a subject-centred curriculum structure to a balanced, integrated and selective curriculum structure to meet the diverse needs of schools and students.
3	Change from partly out-of-date and extremely abstruse curriculum content to essential knowledge and skills in relation to students' lifelong learning.
4	Change from a passive-learning and rote-learning style to an active, problem-solving learning style to improve students' overall abilities to process information, acquire knowledge, solve problems and learn cooperatively.
5	Change in the function of curriculum evaluation from narrowly summative assessment (e.g. examinations for the certificate of levels of achievement and for selection) to more formative purposes, such as the promotion of student growth, teacher development and instructional improvement as additional functions.
6	Change from centralised curriculum control to a joint effort between the central government, local authorities and schools to make the curriculum more relevant to local situations.

Table 2.3 Six Objectives Stated in the Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (OECD, 2016).

To conclude Section 2.3, I have presented the recent educational reforms in China, including the *suzhi* education movement. Although the *suzhi* education promotes a well rounded education with quality, the actual effects of this reform have been widely questioned, and the examination-oriented education remains influential in practice. I will further critically examine some of the issues with the recent educational reforms in China in Chapter 11, the discussion chapter. In the next section, I will discuss parenting and family life in contemporary China to further contextualise my project.

2.4 Parenting in Contemporary China

In this section, I draw on literature to provide a picture of parenting in the family in relation to education in contemporary Chinese society. I consider some of the complexities related to sometimes clashing of traditional filial structures and values and the pressure placed on students by the changing nature of the socio-economic demands. I will start with the changes

in contemporary Chinese parenting practice, which are relevant to this context.

Traditionally, Chinese parenting is described as relatively controlling, restrictive and authoritarian (Chao, 1994; Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013). Parents tend to foster obedience, attachment to family and interpersonal harmony in their children (Ho, 1994). Some scholars suggest the term 'training' (*guan*) should be used to characterise parenting practice in China, which is a form of upbringing that integrates care with discipline, and love with control (see Chao, 1994; Li, Duan, & Patterson, 2017).

However, according to a number of recent studies, parenting has been going through great changes in contemporary Chinese society, along with the rapid changes in political, social and economic domains of the past three decades (Yoshikawa, Way, & Chen, 2012). With the demands of the market economy that values the characteristics of independence, autonomy and creativity (rather than obedience and interdependence), the traditional Chinese parenting ideologies have been challenged (Silbereisen & Chen, 2010). Furthermore, Chinese parents, especially the urban middle-class ones (like many of the parents interviewed in the present research), explicitly and increasingly show a child-centred orientation, valuing open communications with their children, allowing them to make the final decision about a range of issues and attempting to increase their autonomy and independence so as to reduce the power differential between parents and children (Li, Duan, & Patterson, 2017; Yan, 2003). The idea that children ought to be respected as autonomous subjects, who have a right to self-determination, is becoming increasingly common among parents (Naftali, 2009, 2010).

As a result, Chinese parents nowadays are facing a situation of complexity: they are "in the rather difficult position of having to reconcile these contradictory themes of obedience and autonomy in their everyday interactions with children" (Naftali, 2016, p.120). On the one hand, clearly there is a general social process of "the growing empowerment and individualisation of Chinese children within the family and society" (Naftali, 2016, p.118). On the other hand, children are still obliged to obediently accept the authority of the parent and the nationalistic discourse because of the cultural influence of Confucian ethics (such as filial piety), which I have discussed in Section 2.1.1, as well as national-collectivist values (see Kipnis, 2009; Fong, 2004). In this research, I found similar themes relating to the complexity and contradictoriness of parenting, which I discuss in Chapter 9 and Chapter 11. At the same time, what has not changed from the time of ancient China is the widespread

belief that Chinese parents have high educational aspirations for their children, and their children attempt to meet those expectations not only for personal achievement, but also for the sake of the family (Leung, Hou, Gati, & Li, 2011; Shek, 2007). As is laid out in Section 2.1, educational success was greatly emphasised in China influenced by Confucian philosophy and was historically required by the Civil Service Examination. Liu, McMahon, and Watson (2015) clearly show that today's Chinese parents may represent the 'study supremacist' type, based on their study of parents with aggressive and forceful involvement in, and expectations of, their children's education. The educational aspiration of 'study supremacists' is similar to the enthusiasm of middle-class parents for extracurricular activities and schooling in Korea, Japan and England (Kim, 2011; Kim & Bang, 2017; Vincent & Ball, 2007; Vincent, Rollock, Ball, & Gillborn, 2012), with middle-class parents who have high aspirations for their children's education showing a sense of anxiety, urgency and responsibility.

The child-centredness of Chinese society, which is mentioned above, might have already begun with the One-Child Policy⁸ decades ago. Parents (especially mothers) provided enormous devotion and made great sacrifices for their children's upbringing and education (Chao, 1994). This can be seen in the popular Chinese proverbs 'to hope one's son grows up to be a dragon' (*wang zi cheng long*), 'to hope one's daughter grows up to be a phoenix' (*wang nv cheng feng*)⁹. The other side of the coin, associated with this 'hope' on the part of Chinese parents, is their anxiety, which can be reflected in the Chinese proverbs 'pull at sprouts to help them grow' (*ba miao zhu zhang*), 'hate that iron does not become steel' (*hen tie bu cheng gang*).⁹ In many cases, Chinese parents even treat their single child as "the narcissistic object of desire" (Anagnost, 1997, p.218), and other Chinese scholars have confirmed this view and suggested the harmful consequence: "One could say that the care and love that Chinese parents have for their children is number one in the world, but they love their children as if they were property, limiting their freedom, disregarding the child's basic rights" (Chen & Zhang, 2003, p.248).

⁸ In 1979, perceiving population size to be a threat to the goals of economic modernisation, and identifying a mismatch between available resources and need, the Party state implemented the One-Child Policy as a solution. This policy aimed to solve two problems at once: population size reduction and improvement of overall population quality (Kuan, 2015).

⁹ The dragon and the phoenix are traditional mythological animals representing good luck and auspiciousness, which are associated with ideal masculinity (and the emperor) and ideal femininity (and the empress). The proverb is often used in a family context by parents talking about their hopes for their children.

This phenomenon of intense commitment by parents to their 'single child' in China also echoes with the broad cultural shift of parenting towards 'intensive parenting', which requires the enactment of parenting behaviours at the individual level, and which "is often presented as a conscious/willing adoption, whereby parents choose to parent in a particular way" (Smyth & Craig, 2017, p.107). Some scholars have argued that intensive parenting reflects middle-class values (e.g. Vincent, Neal, & Iqbal, 2017; Shirani, Henwood, & Coltart, 2012). As Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2017) suggest, middle-class parents living in a welfare state and neoliberal age are "commonly assumed to be powerful and effective in the field of schooling" whereas working-class parents are presumed to be powerless and ineffective (p.541).

With this rise of intensive parenting in China, there is an increasing demand for books, online and offline courses and workshops related to child rearing and education, and even those on the related genres of popular psychology and self-help for adults. It is also increasingly common for parents of school-age children to attend lectures on child rearing and education that are organised by their schools (Kuan, 2015).

The Steiner education movement was referred to by several Steiner staff as 'mothers' grass-roots, self-help movement seeking good education for their children' (Interview, A7, B18). In the context of contemporary Chinese society, middle-class mothers have in fact long carried the double burden: many of them work full-time while still taking on the majority of responsibility for child-rearing and domestic duties, according to Kuan's (2015) ethnographic study. Similarly, in Sheng's (2015) empirical study, it is clear that mothers are nearly always the ones who are involved in their children's schooling and education. However, it does not mean that fathers are completely excluded from child rearing and parenting. Fathers, according to Sheng's (2015) study, are usually at a distance in terms of parenting and being involved in their children's education, including participation in the planning and decision-making about their children's educational choices.

In the section that follows, I will examine empirical research on parental choice of school, globally and in China.

2.5 Parental Choice of School

My research partly aims to investigate parents' perceptions and choice of Steiner education. Therefore, in this section, the literature on parental choice of school will be reviewed.

2.5.1 Empirical research on parental choice of school

Parental choice of school is defined as the “parent's right to express a preference for the school they would most like their child to attend” (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2009, p.7). Increasingly, countries throughout the world offer school choice options for their citizens. School choice operates in Europe, Asia, the USA and the United Kingdom. Specifically, countries such as England, New Zealand, Sweden, Australia, China, Chile, South Africa and the Czech Republic promote school choice (Plank & Sykes, 2003). The idea of school choice is increasingly to be found in relation to a competitive marketplace, and it has become the norm to regard education as a market commodity in policy and public discourses (Lynch, 2006). Even China appears to have been influenced by this global trend.

My literature review on parental choice of school has revealed that researchers have studied this topic over a number of decades in several different ways, most of which have been public opinion surveys conducted from the 1970s onwards. I found a number of papers related to this topic, most of which are interdisciplinary studies, either sitting on the border of psychology and sociology (Altrichter, Bacher, Beham, Nagy, & Wetzelhütter, 2011; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Wilkins, 2010), related to educational policy (Butler, Carr, Toma, & Zimmer, 2013; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Schneider, Elacqua, & Buckley, 2006) or concerned with school choice in a consumer market (Loeb, Valant, & Kasman, 2011; Stubbs & Strathdee, 2012; Thieme & Treviño, 2011; Whitsel, 2014). This shows us that researchers consider reasons for parental choice to be varied and socially significant. If parents' choice of school for their child is considered as a defining decision, then their choices can be seen as indicative of many other lifestyle choices and social and cultural indicators.

The idea that school choice has become a type of marketplace, with parents acting as consumers is perhaps to be expected in countries that have embraced privatisation of public services, (UK and USA being leading examples) and encouraged competition and choice in all aspects of life. “School choice essentially positions parents as consumers empowered to

select from several options - thereby injecting a degree of consumer-driven market-style competition into the system as schools seek to attract those families” (Feinberg & Lubienski, 2008, p.2).

The methodological approaches to research on parental choice of school vary in the literature. Several studies have presented parents with a lengthy list of criteria that they were then asked to rank (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2011; Collins & Snell, 2000; Petch, 1986; Rätty, 2013; Yorke & Bakewell, 1991). Other studies have adopted a more qualitative approach, potentially allowing parents to provide more nuanced explanations for how they arrived at their decision (Bell, Corson, & Baron, 2014; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Wilkins, 2010). Ethnographic methods have also been reported, often being used to study a particular school and the parents in the community who were considering that school (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014). Mixed methods, on the other hand, have become relatively popular in recent years, often adopting both questionnaire and interview (Bukhari & Randall, 2009; Bussell, 1998; Fensham-Smith, 2019; Joshi, 2014; Poikolainen, 2012; Rothermel, 2003).

My own research investigates parental choice of school in the context of the relatively small-scale, complex, alternative education in China. In this case, I found qualitative methods including ethnographic research, were helpful in gaining in-depth understanding of how people think and construct meaning that underlies their decision-making process. School choice for many parents is a deeply personal decision, potentially revealing a great deal about their economic circumstances and cultural beliefs. For these reasons, highly personal and socially indicative research may throw up false results as people become overly concerned or embarrassed about revealing the genuine information. I will elaborate further on my research methodology in Chapter 4.

In the process of mapping the literature, I found two studies that used a model of *push* and *pull* to categorise parents’ reasons for choosing a particular school. In Goldring and Phillips's study (2008), it is suggested that parents are not *pushed* away from public schools; they are *pulled* towards private schools instead. Similarly in Fensham-Smith's (2019) study about the decision to home educate amongst parents in the UK, she found *push* factors and *pull* factors simultaneously underpinned the decision to choose this form of education. I was encouraged by the findings that this model of *push* and *pull* provided and later in Chapter 7, one of the findings chapters, I have categorised the reasons that parents and teachers chose Steiner

education based on this model of *push* and *pull*. It proved to be a useful model in helping me to consider the full range of reasons for their choice of Steiner education.

To summarise, globally there is an array of literature relating to parental choice of school in the mainstream education setting, but only limited literature on parental school choice exists with regard to alternative education. Several studies look into parental choice with regard to home schooling (Fensham-Smith, 2019; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2004; Rothermel, 2003). Other than my MPhil thesis (Sun, 2015) researching parental choice of Steiner education in England, and a Master's student in Netherlands whom I encountered and who was working on parental choice of Steiner education in China, I have found no empirical studies on parental choice in relation to Steiner education.

Parental reasons for school choice

Globally, there are a number of reasons for parents' choice of school, and previous studies have classified these into various broad categories in order to create a more manageable framework. For example, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1994) has reviewed several school choice studies and categorised reasons for school choice into four groups:

- Academic (e.g. examination results)
- Situational (e.g. travelling distance)
- Ethos (e.g. school management)
- Selection (e.g. all-girls school).

Nevertheless, there are many overlaps between the different categories of reasons, for example, academic, geographical and non-educational reasons, which are illustrated below.

Academic reasons, including academic achievement, constitute some of the key factors for parents when choosing a school (e.g. Denessen, Driessena & Slegers, 2005; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Weiher & Tedin, 2002). For example, one empirical study showed that parents looked at schools with better academic performance (higher scores in reading and mathematics) when they were searching for schools on educational websites (Schneider & Buckley, 2002). It has been found on the basis of

empirical evidence that academic reasons are rated as the most important when it comes to parental choice of school across both public and private schools (Elacqua, Gobierno & Ibanez, 2005). Within the domain of academic performance, examination results are considered to be an important indicator.

Another key factor in parental choice of school is geographical location, which refers to the school's location, geographical closeness and convenience in terms of travel (Bussel, 1998; Collins & Snell, 2000; Taylor, 2001). In Morgan, Dunn, Cairns and Fraser's study (1993), they conclude that convenience is one of the five main school choice determinants. Parents often choose a particular school because it is easy to reach on their way to work. Similar findings have arisen from other studies in both the UK and the USA (Hastings, Kane, Staiger & Weinstein, 2005; Hunter, 1991; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000).

Many studies have reported non-educational reasons as important factors in parental choice of school, such as religious affiliation, socioeconomic background and the child's happiness. Studies have showed that parents preferred a school with a majority of pupils from a similar ethnic background and social class (Bagley, 1996; Glazerman, 1997; Henig, 1996; Saporito, 2003; Weiher & Tedin, 2002). According to several studies, the happiness of a child is another very important factor (Bussel, 1998), and the presence of a child's friends can also contribute to his/her happiness at school (Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Collins & Snell, 2000).

In the context of alternative education, the reasons for parents sending their children to alternative schools are of course wide-ranging. For example, when identifying parents' primary motivation for home schooling, around one third of parents cited concern about the physical environment and natural surroundings of state schools, another third indicated reasons related to religious beliefs, and the rest reported academic reasons or the special needs of their child (Princiotta et al., 2004). In the case of Steiner education in China, there is a lack of literature researching into the reasons parents are sending their children to a Steiner school.

2.5.2 Parental choice of school in China

In the Chinese state education system, school choice is a relatively recent development, coinciding with the introduction of non-state schools in the 1990s (Tsang, 2003), as indicated

in Section 2.2.3. In urban areas, schools are divided into districts or zones, and students go to the state school within their neighbourhood district as required by the government's general policy on school assignment. Thus the notion that parents may be allowed a choice of school can be seen as a significant departure from this policy (Tsang, 2003). With respect to parental choice of school, parents can pay a fee for 'school selection' (*ze xiao*), allowing them to seek a better school outside their assigned district.

There has been limited empirical research into state school choice in China. The most active participants in school choice are mainly middle-class families (Tsang, 2003; Wu, 2013). The substantial fees associated with choice has either created a financial burden on working-class families or effectively closed the door of school choice to them. Well-off middle-class families often scramble to get into the better schools despite the exorbitant fees associated with going outside one's own district. According to Kuan's study (2015), parents from Kunming, a city in south-western China, are willing to seek a school outside their assigned district despite the fact that the 21,000 RMB (around 2,400 GBP) one-off fee is a significant amount of expenditure for the average double-income family. In the private sector, the development of private schools has led to more schooling alternatives for parents. The reality is that often school choice is available only to the most well-off middle-class families in urban China (Kuan, 2015; Tsang, 2003).

For most parents in China, a good school is one that has high student academic achievement and high transition rates with respect to the next stage of schooling (Tsang, 2003; Wu, 2013). School selection in China's examination-centred education system has made school selection one of the most pressing and practical issue among parents; this is an issue I will be discussing further in Chapter 11.

On a final note, although parents choose a school for various reasons, little is known about whether in reality they have achieved what they wanted from their choice. Thus in the current study I intend to investigate not only parental choice of school, but also their feelings and subsequent experience of the school.

To conclude this chapter, I have attempted to present some relevant socio-historical, cultural and political background as well as the educational context of contemporary China, in order

to lay the foundations for my contextualisation of Steiner education in China. I have also discussed parenting, family life and parental choice of school in contemporary China. In the next chapter, I will discuss what Steiner education entails, including its core principles, and contextualised Steiner education in the field of holistic education and alternative education.

Chapter 3 Steiner Education in the Context of Alternative Education and Holistic Education

This chapter contextualises Steiner education in the field of holistic education and alternative education, and reviews relevant literature. It consists of four parts. Firstly, I introduce alternative education, the area in which Steiner education is considered to be situated. I then go on to explore some theoretical considerations that relate to the term ‘holistic education’, while offering a brief genealogy of the term. I then present Steiner education in relation to its conceptual foundations, and examine some of the more nuanced terminology, such as ‘child development’. Finally, I examine the empirical research on Steiner education and alternative education.

3.1 Alternative Education

The term ‘alternative’ implies a more general category of education than holistic and therefore as a term is less prescriptive. The term ‘alternative’ can be understood to refer to a ‘specialist’ or even ‘extreme’ version (consider the use of ‘alt’ in contemporary politics) of a more moderate central mainstream approach. Many so-called ‘alternative’ educators may consider themselves to be practising ‘mainstream’ education; they do so, however, under social conditions in which they have found themselves side-lined in favour of a more popular or state-endorsed educational model. What at first may appear to be a pedantic insistence on semantics illustrates an underlying ideological battle for what is fit to be considered ‘normal’. As is argued by Santos (2016), “The idea of alternatives presupposes the idea of normalcy” and “the designation of something as an alternative carries a latent connotation of subalternity” (p.189). The risk for a non-critical analysis is that without recognising this implicit power dynamic, the term ‘alternative’ becomes unconsciously rendered as ‘strange’ or ‘abnormal’ in opposition to the normality of the state educational model.

My use of the term 'alternative education' in this thesis will refer to what is commonly accepted as an umbrella term, which comprises pedagogical approaches that differ from the established or mainstream models (D'Arcy, 2014). Steiner education is one alternative education model and, as previously discussed, the 'Steiner Fever' can be seen as part of the alternative education movement in China, which also includes the rise of Montessori and home schooling. Therefore, in this section, I will briefly look at the emergence of alternative education in both Western countries and China and examine relevant empirical research on alternative education.

Throughout the world there are a substantial number of schools that provide an alternative curriculum and/or pedagogical approach and that explicitly present themselves as alternatives to mainstream education. They come in various shapes and forms. Some are private alternative schools and some are public alternative schools. Some alternative schools are inspired by philosophical, political or scholarly orientations, and others are more *ad hoc* assemblies of people who are dissatisfied with some aspect of mainstream education (De Bilde, Van Damme, Lamote, & De Fraine, 2013; Mills & McGregor, 2017).

3.1.1 The emergence of alternative education

Formal, publicly funded, 'mass education' began more than 200 years ago in Europe, with Germany leading much of the world. Therefore, according to Holborn (1964), the history of education has undergone two phases, which are roughly aligned with macro-phases of sociocultural development: an informal phase which lasted from the beginnings of early human culture to the Industrial Revolution, and a formal phase of mass education of children in schools, modelled on factories.

During the early twentieth century, the educational sector saw the emergence of a number of alternative school movements, such as democratic/free schools, open schools, Krishnamurti schools, (Waldorf) Steiner schools, Montessori schools and Reggio schools. Some of these pedagogical models developed significantly, resulting in hundreds of new schools being established around the world (e.g. Steiner schools, Montessori schools) and others were very popular for a number of years but eventually lost their appeal (e.g. open schools), whereas others never spread very widely (e.g. Krishnamurti schools). Most of these alternative school movements emerged as a response to dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of mainstream

education, and they shared a concern with the overall development of the child (Rudge, 2008).

The 1970s to 1990s saw a flourishing of alternative educational models, mainly in Europe and North America, though not exclusively, and included home schooling, online learning, holistic education, transformative education, futures education, and a raft of educational reforms within mainstream settings (Gidley, 2007). Some approaches were based on earlier 'progressive' theories such as Piaget's constructivism, Dewey's experiential education and Freire's critical pedagogy, and others used spiritually oriented approaches. Illich's concept of 'deschooling', on the other hand offered more of a general theoretical background, criticising the institutionality of education. Illich (1983) suggested that institutionalised education tended to achieve the opposite of what it claimed to be doing, that is, it was not educating children, rather it was practising a form of social indoctrination. Most of the alternative education models were critical of the formal, modernist, 'factory model' of mass education, and tended not to be rooted in an overly objective or solely rational way of knowing that causes conventional schooling to divide learning into isolated components (Martin, 2002).

Some scholars (e.g. Gidley, 2007; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999) argue that education is in a transition from formal to post-formal, along with other sociocultural shifts arising from postmodern impulses. The introduction of the notion of a post-formal education makes for a compelling conception of the future role of alternative education. Viewed as a three-phase dialectical movement, we could imagine historical educational initiatives as dispersed and highly localised, gradually moving towards an almost worldwide system of near-synchronised models of mass education, which in turn may give way again to a more diverse and organic system of schooling. According to this conception current alternative educational models may be understood to be part of a dialectical transition away from formal state education towards post-formal education. Speculative ideas such as these can be useful in re-examining preconceived notions, challenging what society takes for granted and what is considered as 'normal'.

3.1.2 Alternative education in China

As discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese education system has been modelled on the Russian system, with a

greater degree of rote-learning than in some other countries. Despite the state educational reforms of recent decades, the current Chinese education system is still examination-oriented and highly competitive, and the *Gaokao* still dictates the direction of all stages of education.

In recent years, the alternative education movement, including the Steiner, Montessori, Reggio Emilia models and home schooling, has spread rapidly (Johnson, 2014; Pang, 2015; Walker, 2015). This represents a grass-roots movement seeking alternative forms of education among parents who are dissatisfied with the mainstream education system (Matuszak, 2014; Yang, 2015).

There are issues associated with this movement. Most parents are uncertain about the alternative education models as they are concerned that they may lower their child's performance in the *Gaokao*, thereby affecting their entry to a college or university (Nylander, 2014). For example, in Sheng's (2018) empirical study into a Confucian school in China, she found that despite the positive outcomes of *Meng Mu Tang* reported by several parents, the contemporary public debate focused on how the children who attended *Meng Mu Tang* would be able to continue their secondary education at mainstream schools or how they could take part in the *Gaokao* in China. In addition, most alternative education is costly. For example, the fees at the Steiner school in Chengdu are more than \$3,500 USD per year, and the fees at a new Steiner school, built on several acres of forest land outside Chengdu city, are around \$9,000 USD per year (Matuszak, 2014).

Overall, the alternative movement in China is only reported in news articles, and there are only very limited empirical studies on the current alternative education movement in China, in either English or Mandarin Chinese. Thus this study intends to fill this gap by empirically researching 'Steiner Fever' and its associated issues, so as to provide further insight into the Chinese alternative education movement.

I argue that it is necessary to study these alternative educational models and philosophies (e.g. those of Steiner and Montessori) with a critical lens, as they may well create other systems that are as dogmatic and rigid as the mainstream educational system they reject. The term 'alternative' it must be remembered, is not exclusively associated with a more liberal educational approach; there have been examples of alternative schools which have adopted a stricter, more disciplinary attitude. For example, some of the *guoxue* (Chinese classical

studies) schools¹⁰ that I encountered in China promote an authoritarian interpretation of Confucianism, endorsing corporal punishment, something that is not encouraged in the Chinese state system. Maintaining an open mind toward and studying the values, philosophies and beliefs underlying the variety of educational models should be considered a prerequisite for educational researchers, practitioners and parents. I argue with Martin (2002), who conducted a review of a variety of learner-centred, progressive and holistic alternatives in education, that there is no one 'best system' but rather a diversity of systems that match, or do not match, with the diversity of people in the world.

In the next section, I will go on to explore some theoretical considerations relative to the term 'holistic education'.

3.2 Holistic Education

The terms 'holistic' and 'alternative' are widely used terms that to denote educational models that fall outside what is generally categorised as mainstream education. In the following two sections I will expand on the use of the specific terms and their respective historical contexts.

For some Steiner practitioners the label 'holistic' is problematic as it creates a false sense of genealogy, considering that Steiner education has been practised since 1919 and the holistic education movement was only popularised in the mid-1980s. Indeed, Steiner is considered a key influence with respect to the development of the underlying philosophy of holistic education. Any confusion as the suitability of the term 'holistic' to describe Steiner education most probably stems from the fact that this term has become popular relatively recently. Steiner was of course writing in the German of early 20th century and therefore would not have used the term 'holistic'. In this section, I will briefly present the definition and the history of holistic education, outline some of its aims and discuss some of the underlying assumptions which inform its practice.

¹⁰ A *guoxue* school is generally known as a type of alternative education in China, which has developed in both institutional and popular settings over about 20 years. Traditional Chinese knowledge and philosophies are taught in this type of school, and they often prioritise reading classics over subjects such as mathematics and English language.

3.2.1 Introduction to holistic education: definition and principles

The definition of holistic education and what it entails was not fully articulated until the late 1980s. The first attempt was by two scholars, Ron Miller and John Miller. Today holistic education is recognised around the world as a potential response to the challenges and difficulties faced by the modern world (Miller, 2007). According to Rudge (2008), the field of holistic education has already been extensively studied. Leaders and key figures in this field have: 1) traced the historical roots of holistic education (by Ron Miller); 2) investigated its purpose (by Nakagawa and Forbes), proclaimed its principles (by Global Alliance for Transforming Education), and outlined the educational and philosophical theories underpinning the movement (by Ron Miller, John Miller, Nakagawa and Forbes); 3) designed holistic curriculums (by John Miller and Clark) and suggested holistic practices (by Kessler and John Miller).

Despite the common use of the term 'holistic education' throughout schools, universities and organisations, the field is still relatively unknown in the mainstream academic world (Rudge, 2008). The notion that the term 'holistic' is widely used today but still remains something of a niche academic idea, I think, suggests an implicit problem relating to its interpretation. Holism in general, which is the idea that all the properties of a given system in any field of study cannot be determined or explained by the sum of its component parts. Instead, the system as a whole determines how its parts behave. 'Holism' or 'holistic', as terms, could be understood to suffer from a lack of clarity, in part due to their overuse as 'catch-all' terms that can be applied to a systematic approach in any field, be it education, business or health¹¹.

Throughout the 200-year history of public schooling, a widely scattered group of critics have pointed out that the education of young human beings should involve much more than simply moulding them into future workers or citizens. The Swiss humanitarian Johann Pestalozzi, the American Transcendentalists, Thoreau, Emerson and Alcott, the founders of 'progressive' education - Francis Parker and John Dewey - and pioneers such as Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, among others, all insisted that education should be understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the developing child. (Miller, 2000a, para.1)

¹¹ For a holistic approach to marketing, see 'What is a holistic marketing strategy?' (Cheung, 2019).

If considered as a distinctive movement, it emerged in the mid-1980s in North America as a response to the then dominant worldview of mainstream education, often referred to as the 'mechanistic' or 'Cartesian-Newtonian' worldview (Miller, 2000b). As Ron Miller, who was the founder of the journal *Holistic Education Review* (now entitled *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*) and one of the most influential leaders in this field, argues,

Holistic education is not to be defined as a particular method or technique; it must be seen as a paradigm, a set of basic assumptions and principles that can be applied in diverse ways. (1992, p.21)

Ron Miller's distinction between a particular technique and a paradigm is particularly useful in clearing up any misunderstanding which may surround the term 'holistic education'. The paradigmatic understanding of the term situates it as external to any particular context or historical movement (i.e. 1980s, North America), rather it becomes understood in a broader sense as a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Amid the descriptions of holistic education, there appears to be unanimous agreement that the main purpose of holistic education is to nourish the inherent possibilities of human development (GATE, 1991). On the basis of this interpretation we can understand holistic education as being less concerned with the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills, rather its focus lies with the overall, balanced development (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, aesthetic and spiritual potentials) of every individual.

Rudge (2008), in her literature review, attempts to collate the principle characteristics of holistic education from *Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective* (GATE, 1991), which is summarised in Table 3.1.

	Principle	Explanation
1	Educating for human development	The primary purpose of education is to nourish the inherent possibilities of human development.
2	Honouring students as individuals	Each learner is unique, inherently creative, with individual needs and abilities.
3	The central role of experience	Education is a matter of experience and learning is primarily experiential.
4	Holistic education	The concept of <i>wholeness</i> should be at the core of the educational process.
5	New role of educators	Educators ought to be facilitators of learning, which is an organic, natural process and not a product that can be turned out on demand.
6	Freedom of choice	Students and parents should have opportunities for real choice at every stage of the learning process.
7	Educating for a participatory democracy	Education should be based on democratic values and should empower all citizens to participate in meaningful ways in the life of the community and the planet.
8	Educating for global citizenship	Each individual is a global citizen. Education therefore should foster an appreciation of the magnificent diversity of human experience.
9	Educating for earth literacy	Education must spring organically from a profound reverence for life in all its forms and nurture a relationship between humans and the natural world.
10	Spirituality and education	Every person is a spiritual being and education must nourish the healthy growth of his/her spiritual life.

Table 3.1 Ten Basic Principles of Holistic Education

3.2.2 History and evolution of Holistic Education

The twentieth century undoubtedly saw an active interest in solidifying the core ideas of what we now refer to as 'holistic education'. Many scholars feel the modern 'look and feel' of holistic education did not coalesce until after the introduction of humanism after World War II and the cultural paradigm shift beginning in the mid-1960s (Forbes, 1996). However, too much of a focus on the North American movement risks losing sight of fact that ways of being which can be described as 'holistic' have existed and continue exist around the world.

Many theorists feel the core ideas of holism are not new but "timeless and found in the sense of wholeness in humanity's religious impetus" (Forbes, 1996, p.1). Forbes helps articulate the inherent historical short-sightedness that would be present in any attempt to situate holistic

education, a loose grouping of ideas and notions, in any particular historical movement. As has already stated, Steiner education predates the term 'holistic' and many of Steiner's underlying assumptions are to be found in biblical texts (McDermott, 2009). What remains true of ancient ideas and 'timeless values' is that they require renewed articulation in order to remain relevant to the specific needs and particularities of a given historical epoch.

Holism is indeed a word of Western origin, related to the Greek work *holos*, but if we understand it as a paradigm, that is to say a set of assumed ontological and epistemological values, it shares many similarities with Eastern theologies and philosophies. Nakagawa (2000) claims that the main objective of Eastern holistic education is to transform the total being in pursuit of the higher *Self*. The ultimate aim is to realise what he calls the 'formless *Self*' (enlightenment). This notion of the 'formless *Self*' is reminiscent of ideas present in the Buddhist tradition, such as the concept of *tathagatagarbha*¹². Here Nakagawa makes an important bridge between a Western interpretation of *holism* and ideas found in traditional Eastern philosophies. In Eastern holistic education, the practices of contemplation, meditation and the arts are the primary means to bring about the 'real' transformation of the self.

It should also be noted that the relative popularisation and institutionalisation of holistic education models in the mid-1960s does not mean that the appetite for holistic approaches were missing from life in general before this period. Many philosophers such as Kant, Hegel and Steiner himself refer to ancient Greece as a time in which what we now consider to be holistic ways of being were more widely practised. In many ways the need to name a concept such as 'holistic' is closely related to the degree to which it is ontologically embedded. If, for the ancient Greeks or, indeed, for ancient Chinese cultures, holistic approaches to life were ontologically given, then the need to name specific approaches to life as 'holistic' would have evaporated. If being itself is holistic in its ontological orientation, then the term 'holistic' as a point of difference becomes not only superfluous, but also potentially unimaginable; this distinction works in a similar manner to how the notion of 'clean air' acquired its relative meaning during the Industrial Revolution with the introduction of polluted air, prior to which, the concept of air and 'clean air' were immanently interchangeable.

Contemporary holistic education not only draws on theories and ideas advocated by thinkers

¹² In Buddhism, the term *tathagatagarbha* refers to the innate possibility in every sentient being to attain Buddha-hood and manifest this timeless Buddha-nature.

such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel (Miller, 1992; Forbes, 2003), but also integrates concepts and principles from other philosophical orientations. For example, Nakagawa (2000), who is a leader in the field of holistic education in Japan, has summarised six major theories or worldviews underpinning holistic education: 1) perennial philosophy, 2) indigenous worldviews, 3) life philosophy, 4) ecological worldview, 5) systems theory, and 6) feminist thought. See Appendix 1 for a summary of Nakagawa's theories, based on Rudge's work (2008).

Thus we can consider holistic education as a mutable field, defined by its core principles of incorporating all aspects of the human condition, as has been laid out above. However, these specific fields are themselves changeable and developing within their own internal structures of critique. That is to say, a field such as psychology, evolves in relation to specific cultural and historical demands, such as the need to recognise issues of gender and race, which may have been historically overlooked. The value of holistic education considered as a paradigmatic term, which seeks to harbour ideas related to the maintenance of the human condition, should be considered in relation to the development of the relative health of fields, which inform it. Understanding what constitutes the basic assumptions (as referred to by Ron Miller) of 'wholeness' must be viewed in relation to specific historical and cultural conditions. Therefore the concept of holistic education reveals a complex web of ideas relating to the expression and manifestation of universal and timeless values vis-à-vis their situatedness within specific fields of understanding. With this in mind, we should consider summaries, such as Nakagawa's (2000) six major theories, as subject to constant rehabilitation as new demands reveal previously unimaginable prejudicial aspects of society, which until this time have remained unconsidered in relation to the concept human 'wholeness'.

In the next section, I will discuss Steiner education in relation to its conceptual foundations, and examine some of the more nuanced terminology, such as 'child development'.

3.3 Steiner Education

3.3.1 Introduction to Steiner education

The goal of Steiner education is one which claims to enable pupils to grow into adults capable of thinking for themselves and making independent judgements (Paull, 2011). According to Easton (1997), a scholar in Steiner education, there are six distinguishing key elements of Steiner education: 1) a theory of child development; 2) a theory of teacher self-development; 3) a core curriculum that integrates artistic and academic work; 4) a method of teaching as an art that pays careful attention to synchronising teaching methods with the rhythm of a child's unfolding capacities; 5) integration of teaching and administration; and 6) building the school and the greater Steiner community as networks of support for students, teachers, and parents.

A distinctive feature of Steiner education is the encouragement of continuity of relationships between the teachers and pupils. A class teacher continues with the same group of students throughout their period in the lower school, which lasts for eight years. The class teacher is responsible for the principal subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography etc.), which are taught in the 'main lesson', a two-hour period at the beginning of each day. Specialised teachers teach other subjects, such as foreign languages, music, craft and *eurythmy*¹³. The class teacher is in charge of the academic achievement and progress of each pupil and s/he maintains close contact with the parents to discuss the child's overall development (Ogletree, 2000).

Another integral feature of Steiner education is the importance accorded to parental involvement in the child's education, as well as to adult learning and development in the wider school community (Woods, Ashley & Woods, 2005). Parents are frequently invited to attend evening lectures on the distinctive philosophy and pedagogy of Steiner education, as well as regular school festivals where they can see their children's work. Some schools also offer classes in art and craft that parents may attend. In addition, many parents are also

¹³ *Eurythmy* is an expressive movement art that originated from Rudolf Steiner in conjunction with Marie von Sivers in the early twentieth century. Primarily a performance art, it is also used in education, especially in Waldorf schools, and as part of anthroposophic medicine for claimed therapeutic purposes (Lötzke, Heusser, & Büssing, 2015).

significantly involved in running the schools, often in a practical sense, including the maintenance of the buildings. Parents are also active members of committees: they are responsible for organising, planning and working in the festivals promoted by the Steiner system, and they maintain close contact with teachers. Steiner education encourages a high degree of parental involvement as part of its holistic approach. In Chapter 9 I will present the parental experience of Steiner education so as to expand empirically on aspects of parental involvement.

Steiner schools globally, are financially, pedagogically and managerially independent of state control (with the exception of the public schools that have adopted their pedagogy) and are run as a self-governing administrative unit (Ogletree, 2000). Generally this independence remains true of the Chinese context, in which Steiner schools are 'officially' independently run and organised in line with Steiner schools globally. However, genuine institutional independence is an extremely complex issue within China. The unlicensed Steiner schools will undoubtedly maintain a higher degree of autonomy than the licensed schools which have sought governmental approval. Teachers are in charge of the administration of the school and they usually elect a faculty member or an outside individual to manage school finances. All decisions regarding students, faculty, curricula, enrolment, finances etc. are brought to the 'college of teachers' for discussion and resolution (Ogletree, 2000).

3.3.2 Tracing the thoughts of Steiner through Goethe

A major influence on the Steiner approach can be found in the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), after whom Steiner named his first centre for the anthroposophical movement, the *Goetheanum*¹⁴. Goethe developed a method of observing the natural world which placed greater emphasis than did his contemporaries (who favoured more reasoning-based approaches) on direct experience, intuition and imagination, which he believed provided access to nature's creative process. As Goethe said, "If we want to attain a living understanding of nature, we must become as flexible and mobile as nature herself" (Goethe, 1995, p.62).

Goethe's approach to studying the natural world became known as 'Goethean observation', a

¹⁴ The Anthroposophical Society has its international centre at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

type of dynamic and holistic practice which seeks to become aware of the "inner physiognomic 'drive to formation' or *Bildungstrieb*" (Jensen, n.d.). The relevance of this Goethean approach to observing the world is that it recognises the inherent limitations of an approach based on intellectual cognition alone. A method which recognises the reach of human reason and rationalism is intended to avoid the familiar dichotomy between intellect, on the one hand, and intuition, on the other, instead seeing these as interacting faculties from which a human being may develop a holistic approach to natural phenomena of which they are themselves a part. These ideas were a strong influence on Steiner's development of *anthroposophy*: through his observation of children he was able to draw out what he considered to be their inner drives or needs. Steiner's anthroposophical method sought, as Goethe did, to close the gap between intellectual and spiritual realm, or what might be considered scientific and empirical approaches. As natural beings endowed with consciousness, Steiner considered humans to be the entities in which the intellectual and spiritual worlds coalesced, hence his referring to *anthroposophy* as a 'spiritual science'.

In terms of designing an education system which seeks to best serve the individual and therefore the wider community, one may ask what the fundamental needs and requirements of a human being are. In recognition of the fact that this is a question which science alone cannot answer, one must seek guidance from other forms of understanding, such as human intuition.

[I]ntellectual knowledge is unable really to understand the living [i.e. the organic world]. [...] Nor can the ordinary scientific mentality come to anything that could be called scientific morality for lack of knowledge of the true nature of the world and the spiritual beings that created it. [...] The great pioneer in this kind of thinking was Goethe, though it was Steiner who was the man most responsible for making explicit what was only implicit in Goethe's own numerous writings on scientific subjects. (Easton, 1989, p.268-269)

Steiner's method for responding to the needs of individual children developed out of his research employing Goethean observation, a method he used to study children. Practically speaking, this involves the teacher closely observing a child's behaviour in a non-judgemental fashion (Priess, 1999). Child observation or child study is an activity still practised by

teachers in Steiner schools and forms a core element of their child-centred teaching¹⁵.

3.3.3 Education structure based on the theory of child development

Steiner education is based on the belief that with the right guidance and proper nurturing, the child will naturally ‘unfold’ at the appropriate stage of development. In order to help understand these claims, we can consider the stages of development of organisms in the natural world. Steiner considers human being as the most complex of all natural organisms (Steiner, 1922) and that humans also have naturally occurring rhythms of development. This natural rhythm to which humans necessarily belong can be thought of as the implicit biological substructure upon which the social and historical aspects of human life become manifest. If a biologist may talk scientifically about the different stages of growth in which an acorn turns into a sapling and eventually a fully mature oak tree, Steiner believed he could do something similar with the developmental stages of human beings. By definition, child development entails the biological, psychological and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth and the end of adolescence, which is a continuous process that operates in a predictable sequence. Each individual may progress at a different rate and each stage is affected by the preceding developmental experiences (Kail, 2015). Any scientific study of the human condition, however, must also take into account human consciousness and therefore, according to Steiner, must address the question of 'spirituality'.

One of the foundational concepts of the teaching of *anthroposophy* and Steiner education is the threefold human being. Steiner repeatedly argued that the three major powers of the human soul, *thinking* (related to head), *feeling* (related to heart) and *willing* (related to hands), are the dominant ways through which we connect with the world. Steiner also suggests that whereas education at all stages should be holistic and integrated, each phase can be seen to correspond to one set of capacities, with an emphasis on learning through the hands as a young child (ages 0-7), through the heart in middle childhood (ages 7-14), and through the head in later youth (ages 14-21). In Chapter 6 I will take a closer look at how these theories are actually practiced at the two Steiner schools in China.

¹⁵ As Steiner notes, “Where is the book in which the teacher can read about what teaching is? The children themselves are this book. We should not learn to teach out of any book other than the one lying open before us and consisting of the children themselves.” (Steiner, 1998, p.44)

The educational structure of Steiner schools is directly based on Steiner's three developmental stages. Each stage lasts approximately seven years, which is broadly similar to those later observed and described by Piaget (1971). Each of the three major stages requires specific learning strategies appropriate to each stage (Ullrich, 2008), which is summarised in Table 3.2.

	Specific Learning Strategies
First Major Stage	<p>The first major stage is preschool and kindergarten for children up to the age of 7. According to Steiner's pedagogical theory, during the first seven years of life children learn best by being immersed in an environment they can learn from through unselfconscious imitation of practical activities. Thus the teachers strive to be the role models worthy of imitation by the children, and the early childhood curriculum centres on experiential learning and imaginative play (Waite & Rees, 2011). The kindergartens are designed to mirror an ideal home environment: children hear stories, model beeswax, bake bread, sing, paint and build play houses. Formal learning of literacy and numeracy is not introduced until students enter the elementary school, as Steiner suggested that engaging young children in abstract, intellectual activity too early would adversely affect their development (Uhrmacher, 1995).</p>
Second Major Stage	<p>The second major stage is elementary education, which is for children between the ages of 7 and 14 when they are ready for formal learning. There is an emphasis on cultivating children's emotional life and imagination, allowing students to connect more deeply with the subject matter. Therefore academic content is delivered using artistic tools, including story-telling, pictorial presentation, visual arts, drama, movement, vocal and instrumental music, as well as crafts (Easton, 1997).</p>
Third Major Stage	<p>The third major stage is secondary education (ages 14 to 21) when children are expected to develop their capacities in understanding abstract material and forming their own judgement and conclusions. Therefore secondary education focuses much more strongly on academic subjects, and the curriculum is structured to foster students' intellectual understanding, critical thinking, and ethical ideals such as social responsibility (Uhrmacher, 1993).</p>

Table 3.2 Specific Learning Strategies Appropriate to Each Major Stage in Steiner Education

Steiner did not design specific curricula for the period of 0-7 or 14-21, he only indicated what was needed for these phases (Rawson & Richter, 2000). The kindergarten and secondary school are therefore interpretations of Steiner's educational teachings, rather than institutions that follow directly laid out curricula. I have summarised the three main phases of Steiner education in terms of the developmental stages in relation to the threefold human being in Table 3.3.

Phase of Education	Ages 0 - 7	Ages 7 - 14	Ages 14 - 21
Threefoldness	Willing	Feeling	Thinking
	Hands (limbs and sense organs)	Heart (rhythmic systems)	Head (brain/nervous system)
Developmental Stages	Imitation, experiential learning and imaginative play.	Imagination and cultivation of emotional life.	Abstract thinking, developing reasoning and judgements.

Table 3.3 Three Main Phases of Steiner Education Relative to the Developmental Stages and the Threefold Human Being

In Section 3.3, I have attempted to present some historical and theoretical contextualisation of the development of Steiner's own philosophically based pedagogy. As previously stated, the influence of Goethean observation upon Steiner's child-centred pedagogy, resulted in the delineation of specific stages of child development. The emphasis was on a holistic approach, which sought to bring together the intellectual, emotional, psychological and spiritual development of a child. In the section that follows, I will discuss empirical research on Steiner education.

3.4 Empirical research on Steiner education

In this section I provide a brief literature review of the empirical research on Steiner education in order to place my study in context. The literature review has drawn on both English and Mandarin Chinese material. In the process of mapping literature on Steiner education, I found a large number of studies on Steiner schools in North America (e.g.

Friedlaender, Beckham, Zheng, & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Mitchell, Baldwin, & Gerwin, 2005; Muñoz, 2016), in Europe (e.g. Steenbergen, 2009), as well as comparative studies across various countries (e.g. Boland, 2015; Mitchell & Gerwin, 2008). Studies of Steiner schools outside the North American, European and Australian contexts remain relatively few.

In the light of my literature review, it appears that most research on Steiner education between 1996 and 2018 internationally has been conducted by those who are directly involved in Steiner education. Friedlaender et al. (2015) suggest that the research on Steiner education must be expanded to allow for a more independent evaluation of its legitimacy. In addition, I found most of the English-language research on Steiner education (between 1996 and 2018) tended to be desk-based and often focusing on specific aspects of Steiner education, such as teacher training or teacher development. Woods, Ashley and Woods (2005), who have conducted a systematic and comprehensive literature review on all the published empirical research evidence concerning Steiner education in English-language databases, also suggest most studies were small-scale and lacking in wider academic contextualisation.

Outside the existing Steiner-generated literature, I highlight three studies that reflect promising methodological approaches. The first was a year-long, mixed-methods study of a public Steiner school in Sacramento, published by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) (Friedlaender et al., 2015). The 139-page report that was produced highlighted many interesting findings which reveal that this Steiner school "successfully supports students' development" (p.iii), including their academic, social, emotional, physical and creative development. Both quantitative analysis of student record data and qualitative analysis of nearly 40 interviews with the school support this claim. It suggests that students from this school outperform similar students in the same district on several behavioural and academic measures. Interviews with graduates revealed that their educational experiences support their continued growth and learning orientation through high school and college.

The second (Oberman, 2007) is a mixed-methods study comparing public Californian charter schools with one another, melding statistical analysis of student achievement data with qualitative interviews with members of individual public Steiner schools. The third is the research project commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) of the UK (Woods, et al., 2005). The aim of the project was to explore the differences and

commonalities between Steiner schools and the mainstream schools in order to identify the scope for the two sectors to learn from each other. Collectively, the three studies (Friedlaender et al., 2015; Oberman, 2007; Woods, et al., 2005) suggested a cumulative sense of a positive relationship between Steiner schools and learning, achievement and pupils' development of academic, creative, social and other capabilities. It also showed that the Steiner philosophy provided students and teachers with a space to develop meaningful and lasting relationships with each other.

Easton (1997) found that the educators in Steiner education strive to engage the whole child in the learning process, head, heart and hands, and that children become more involved and enthusiastic about learning. Students talked about learning to balance the intellectual with the artistic and the practical, to enjoy work but "not get lost in professionalism or materialism", to be a "person beyond one's work", to "think for oneself but consider others" (Easton, 1995, pp.259, 277). Many had strong social concerns that transcended their own self-interest, and a desire to help less-privileged people, protect animals, and preserve the natural environment (Easton, 1995).

Steenbergen's (2009) empirical study indicated that traditional schools were more effective than Steiner schools in narrowing the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students. An empirical study by Jeffrey and Woods (2003) commented that stress amongst teachers was generated by some aspects of Steiner schooling, such as parental expectations and the collegial way of running schools. My personal encounters with Steiner teachers, both in England and China, leads me to concur with Jeffrey and Woods's findings that teachers often seem very overloaded with multiple tasks required of them.

There are numerous instances of Steiner education being criticised for being self-referential and not moving with the times. Ullrich uses the phrase "self-institutionalising" and describes the pedagogy as "antiquated" (Ullrich, 2008, p.167&165). Speaking from her experience of Waldorf schools in the United States and Brazil, da Souza comments that the Steiner curriculum "privileges a certain body of knowledge (it is visibly Eurocentric) and neglects important cultural, economical, and political issues" (2012, p.60). At the same time, teachers and academics working within, or who are connected to, Steiner school communities on different continents have begun to draw attention to the fact that, despite its outer 'success' in being adopted in an increasing number of countries, there are specific issues associated with

the contextualisation and localisation of Steiner education and, specifically, how it manifests in non-European contexts (Boland, 2015). This is a point of contention, which I will be looking at in greater detail in relation to my empirical findings in the discussion chapter, Chapter 11.

With respect to Steiner education in China, I have only found a few news articles and one Master's thesis in the English databases. The news articles are largely descriptive, introducing the rise of Steiner education together with other alternative education models in China. As the only research study on Steiner education in China in the English databases, Wang's (2015) research was an interdisciplinary cultural study. She attempted to describe the culture among the Steiner education participants in China, using interviews and observations and a grounded theory approach. Her findings provided interesting insights, but little information was given on the rationale for the choice of methodology and design, and the link is missing between how the data were generated and the findings.

My literature review of Chinese-language publications was conducted via the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. The literature review reveals that researchers in China started researching Steiner education in the early 2000s. Most studies involved desk-based research, with the majority being merely translations and summaries of foreign works on Steiner education (e.g. Fei, 2008; Wu & Huang, 2010; Zhang & Yang, 2008). They were mostly raising critical questions, which could be useful but have not been empirically tested. Secondly, most studies concentrated on early years education in Steiner kindergartens rather than Steiner schools. Additionally, the majority of studies were qualitative studies, including some qualitative case studies. I have encountered no ethnographic work in which the researcher spent a prolonged time embedded in the field. Lastly, most of the research studies on Steiner education in Mandarin Chinese databases can be broadly grouped into two categories. The first category has systematically reviewed and discussed the educational philosophy and concepts of Steiner education. For example, a few studies have reviewed educational concepts, such as child development, holistic education and closeness to nature in Steiner education (Cai & Fu, 2013; Fang, 2014; Hu & Mao, 2013; Li, Luo & Wang, 2005; Tian, 2015; Yang & Zhang, 2013). The second category has focused on the curriculum and pedagogical practice in the Steiner kindergartens and schools in Western countries, such as Germany, the UK and the USA. For example, a few studies have looked at the curriculum and pedagogy, including play, art and music education, as practised with children in Steiner

kindergartens (Gui, 2011; He, 2012; Wang, 2012; Xue, 2011; Zhang & Yang, 2008).

In summary, there are several findings that emerged from the literature review. Firstly, almost all studies have focused on Steiner education in Western countries, such as the USA, Australia and Sweden (e.g. Angus & O'Connor, 2011; Dahlin, 2010; Mitchell, Baldwin, & Gerwin, 2005; Mitchell & Gerwin, 2008; Muñoz, 2016; Oberman, 2007; Steenbergen, 2009). Also, most studies have researched Steiner education from the students' perspective, exploring, for example, play and learning (Lester & Maudsley, 2007), or from the teachers' perspective, for instance, Steiner teachers' workload and stress (House & Richard, 2001; Oberski, Pugh, Maclean, & Cope, 2007). Few studies have investigated the parents' perspective. Among the empirical studies on Steiner education, internationally and especially in China, few researchers have considered perceptions of Steiner education in relation to the experience of Steiner schools.

The current study thus contributes to filling the existing gaps by researching Steiner education in China, and investigating parental perspectives as well as their changing experiences of Steiner education over time. My study has sought to offer findings in relation to this question by taking an empirical approach and interviewing and living in close proximity to Steiner parents and teachers. Crucially my study provides critical feedback from parents in relation to their choices after they had been made, and once they had witnessed the practices of the schools. This study also contributes to the wider empirical research on alternative education in China in general, of which there is a distinct lack.

The next part of my thesis comprises Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology adopted to answer the research questions that my study has addressed and the rationale for my chosen methodology. Building on this, Chapter 5 introduces methods I chose to generate and analyse data for this research.

Chapter 4 Methodology

The purpose of the study was to understand the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon in Chinese contexts. This chapter presents the research stance and methodology for the present doctoral research. I begin with the research paradigm and research stance from which I approached this inquiry. Then I will justify why I have chosen an ethnographic approach for this study to investigate Steiner education in China, and the decisions about research sites. Following that I will present how I conducted the pilot study as well as the 10-month fieldwork in the two Steiner schools in China. I conclude by reflecting on the ethical considerations.

4.1 Research Paradigm

In considering paradigm difference, issues related to communicability may arise. Language becomes the somewhat troubled arbiter, attempting to carry meaning from one consciousness to another. For this reason, simply stating examples of traditional Chinese relationality in the form of English sentences is a potentially thankless task. Terms such as 'interconnected' and 'holistic' may appear as naïve or utopian if they are merely interpreted cognitively and not felt. If I, as a researcher, can keep such terms from slipping into cliché precisely through my emphasis on the gaps in meaning (which is what gets lost in translation between thinking and feeling), then I feel I will be doing my job. That is to say, if I may present what remains 'unpresentable' between Chinese thought and the Western metaphysical tradition, I hope to maintain a degree of the immanence pertaining to ancient Chinese thought. My role as a researcher is to acknowledge this difficulty and therefore allow space for expressing of the meaning, which may not be directly translatable yet may potentially be graspable.

I feel I was only able to find my critical voice once I had begun my ethnographic fieldwork and had become exposed to the real lives of the Steiner parents, teachers and students. I would describe my initial epistemology as constructivism. In many regards I have stayed close to this approach, which I find has many benefits, such as its anti-positivist position. However, due to the aspects of transcendental exploration required in this study, I felt that

even a constructivist perspective would potentially impose on my ability to investigate universal notions such as the 'Tao'.

The notion of a 'paradigm' already presupposes an entire discourse from a particular line of thinking originating from ancient Greece and charged with Kuhnian influence. What remains questionable is the degree to which Kuhn's own notion of scientific paradigms has itself caused a paradigmatic shift in which academics are encouraged to situate their research according to paradigms. With this in mind and with specific reference to ancient Chinese thought, I would like to suggest that the possibility of thinking in a non-paradigmatical manner must also be preserved.

Ermine (2007) proposed the notion of ethical space, which is a space that is not only inclusive of indigenous perspectives and knowledge traditions, but is also seen as equal to that of the dominant mainstream standard. To speak of 'Tao' as referring to an alternative paradigm is legitimate from a Western perspective, but to do so should be viewed as a particular perspective rather than a universal claim. In this sense the 'Tao' may not be analogous to anything which exists within Western scientific tradition: to attempt to analyse the term scientifically may indeed lead one further away from its graspability.

In the current study, I would describe my stance as similar to what Marshall refers to as 'two-eyed seeing'¹⁶ (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2015), that is, with one eye situated in the traditional Chinese way of knowing, and the other eye within the Western tradition. This project weaves in and out of Chinese traditional beliefs and values, Western ways of knowing emanating out of its scientific and metaphysical lineage, ethnographic methodology, and Goethean science, Chinese socio-political histories and experience under modernisation, etc.

Traditional Chinese knowledge is not usually considered as indigenous knowledge. The discussion of ancient Chinese epistemologies is barely touched upon by Santos (2016), presumably in part to the fact that China was not colonised in the traditional sense. Only occasionally, is traditional Chinese medicine seen as an indigenous knowledge system

¹⁶ In Marshall's words, two-eyed seeing is: "To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p.335).

(Hartzell, 2005). However, I argue that Chinese traditional forms of knowledge, for example, the Taoist, Confucianist and Buddhist ways of being and knowing are in line with the definition of indigenous knowledge. These forms of knowledge have been a fundamental aspect of Chinese existence for 2,500 years and have been dis-embedded through China's modernisation process and its Cultural Revolution.

I propose that traditional Chinese thinking is derived from very different foundations, which are distinctive from Western philosophies and paradigms and are imbued with a strong anti-positivistic stance. The Chinese, including myself as the researcher, may be embedded in other areas of thought outside the Western cannon, which traditionally pertains to the categorical distinctions handed down from ancient Greece, from which the fields of ontology and epistemology originate. The Chinese frame the way they see the world and the way they organise themselves in it.

4.2 Ethnography

Ethnography is "the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.1) over a prolonged period, and with sensitivity to the existence of "variation in cultural patterns" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.9).

4.2.1 Why use ethnography?

In the current research, I have chosen ethnography in order to study the phenomenon of 'Steiner Fever' by investigating parents and teachers who are involved in Steiner education in China. In this section, I will elaborate on the specificities of my ethnographic methodology.

Ethnography is a form of research that attends to the social relations and cultural practices of groups of people, and works to understand these aspects of social life within broader political, economic and historical contexts. Willis and Trondman (2000) describe ethnography as "involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience" (p.5).

Traditionally, ethnographies have been used in anthropology to study exotic, foreign cultures (Yon, 2003) in an attempt to generate an in-depth understanding of the life of the cultural 'other' (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). The key difference in my research is that I am studying my own culture. My ethnographic approach therefore will differ from the traditional notion as described above. As a native Chinese person who has undergone Steiner teaching training in the UK, I am less able simply to objectify my participants as exotic entities. In this regard my ethnographic methodology does not take the view of researching the cultural 'other'.

Modern-day social ethnographies have "extended contact with a given community", paid attention to the "description of local particularities", focused on an "individual's perspectives and interpretations of their world" and are often concerned with "the refinement of theory" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.8). While ethnography as a methodology was initially developed by anthropologists, it has been used and refined by researchers working in disciplines ranging from sociology and social work, to business studies. This methodology offers researchers the chance to engage directly and for a sustained period of time with the people they are studying, with the hope to gain a much deeper and richer understanding of how life is lived at a particular time and in a particular space. The broadening of the reach of ethnography helped contextualise my methodological approach.

There are, however, still some obvious barriers and limitations to these modern ethnographic methodologies, namely, the epistemology gap as presented by Santos (2016). This 'gap' is often overlooked within ethnographic studies, which often assume that time spent in the field is equivalent to full immersion in a specific culture. However, each culture should be understood as carrying its own ontology and epistemology, which have all too often been overlooked by researchers who simply presuppose their own paradigmatic outlook to be that of those whom they are studying. As a native Chinese person living in England I feel I carry a specific awareness of these issues, I have attempted to conduct my ethnographic study with the required sensitivity towards paradigm differences, which may be lacking in other studies. The importance of considering epistemological and ontological perspectives when analysing my empirical data will be further explored in Chapter 11.

I found ethnography suitable for a study that aimed to address complex questions, such as why parents choose and how they experience Steiner education in the socio-historical, cultural contexts of modern China. This is because ethnography would enable me, as the

researcher, to gain a rich and contextualised understanding of the everyday social lives and relationships of people in the Steiner communities and of nuances not available to studies based only on interviews or questionnaires. I hoped that by entering into first-hand interaction with those in their everyday lives, I would be able to reach a deeper understanding of their perceptions, behaviours and experience than I can by using interviews or questionnaires only. The risk of using interviews or questionnaires only is that researchers may too rigidly rely on preformulated objectives, thus reducing the potential to allow the inevitable feedback from their experiences to infiltrate and refine their approach.

Fieldwork, which requires a researcher to be personally immersed in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group when carrying out the research, is an essential aspect of ethnography (Wolcott, 1973). A long time in the field contributes to the establishment of rapport with the key informants, and allows data to be gathered using a variety of field techniques, such as observations and interviews from a number of informants, as well as for cross-comparisons to be made. However, one needs to remain realistic as to the level and depth of immersion that may realistically occur: despite the best efforts of the researcher it lies beyond their capacity to be fully aware of the ways in which they themselves may be exoticised. In this study, I conducted my ethnographic work with a critical analysis of its methodological limitations, with the understanding that my awareness of my potential methodological limitations would help reduce their impact.

Adopting ethnography as my methodology provided an opportunity to discover discrepancies between what participants might have said and what actually took place. Observing this gap firsthand, over time, allowed me to fully examine and discuss the contradictions and inconsistencies which emerged. Moreover, I found spending an extended period of time in the ethnographic field very helpful when it came to let people's voices emerge naturally and to observing their lives in these Chinese Steiner communities. There were some elements, such as trust and respect that needed time to develop. In Section 6.3, I have written about how parents and teachers only trusted me enough to share their perceptions after weeks in which I dedicated myself to building relationships with them. In addition, my conversation with my host family's mother about how fond she was of school, when I first moved into her house, contradicted what she shared three months later about her plan to withdraw her child from the school. Thus not just taking participants' words at face value in a simple interview or a questionnaire, but undertaking a prolonged period of talking to them and living

with them at close quarters were extremely rewarding in the case of this study.

My argument is that effective and critically aware ethnography rests upon the idea that researchers can come to a productive understanding of lived realities through close participation and immersion in daily life. Much of what sets ethnographic research apart from other research methods, such as questionnaires, is that ethnographic knowledge is created in and through the ethnographer's relationship with those s/he studies. This reveals both its strength and weakness due to the implicit complexities of human relationships.

By engaging in human relationships as well as attempting to undertake self-reflexivity towards such processes, ethnographers may hope to both experience and record the social norms, rules and practices that shape diverse forms of human society. According to Hesse-Biber (2014), ethnographers “need to cultivate empathy, imagination and open-mindedness”, in addition to “asking incisive, careful questions and maintaining an observant eye” (p.108). Also, each ethnographic moment, each encounter with a new research participant and each field site require the ethnographer to begin anew, as each situation requires the ethnographer to navigate ever-changing social relationships and contexts. In Section 6.3 I will explain in detail how I formed and maintained relationships with parents, teachers and students in the two Steiner school communities in which I conducted my fieldwork.

To conclude, I find ethnography as a methodology ultimately exciting and enriching, in part due to its limiting factors. It requires a dynamic, flexible, evolving approach towards navigating the complexities of human relations. As a research methodology it provides a wealth of information and experiential learning. The relative strength of the ethnographic approach, I would suggest, is dependent on the degree to which the researcher acknowledges the realisation that it may only ever provide a partially revealed picture. Questions of paradigm (including ontology and epistemology) and indeed psychology all remain to be further examined in the light of any ethnographic data. Later in Section 5.1, I will elaborate my choice of methods, guided by ethnography as the methodology.

4.2.2 Reflexivity

There is widespread agreement amongst researchers that *reflexivity* is of importance and can

be helpful in the research process (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Nadin & Cassell, 2006). Reflexivity means taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one's own lived reality and experiences. It is a process by which the researcher recognises, examines and understands how his or her own social background, location and assumptions can influence the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). From the selection of the research design and method(s) to the analysis and interpretation of findings, the researcher's agenda can impact the research process. Reflexivity is a way for researchers to account for their personal bias and examine the effects that these biases may have on the data produced (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017).

During the fieldwork, I constantly examined the questions I asked during interviews and conversation and reminded myself that these questions were not 'value free' for they often reflected my values, attitudes and agendas (Hesse-Biber, 2014). In addition, I strove to be mindful when positioning myself in the setting so that I would be able to break down the power and authority that is often inherent in the researcher-researched relationship. Whenever I could, I provided more information about myself, telling participants I was a researcher in training, not an expert, rather they themselves were the experts on their own lives. I constantly reminded myself and the participants that I was there to listen, and to learn about their concerns, hopes and their lives. As often as I could I checked with myself whether I was mindfully and non-judgmentally listening to the participants, in the way that they felt they were being heard. .

In this research, my process of reflexivity was aided by my use of a research diary, which acted as a useful organisational aid to keep a record of my research process. This allowed me to acknowledge and reflect upon my own personal and other incidental factors that might shape the research. Also, during my data analysis and writing-up, I used this kind of record and evidence to contextualise my research as a product of the changing positionality of both myself and those I was studying. In particular, I followed the suggestion given by Luttrell (2010) in her *Reflexive writing exercises*. She asserted, "Reflexive writing can vary in length, form, and content, but its purpose is to make your thinking visible" (p.469). I incorporated in my research process the three important features about writing that she proposed, and the following Table 4.1 summarises how I have applied the exercises in my research process.

	Reflexive Writing Exercises	What I have Incorporated in My Research Process
1	Writing for myself	I tried to write all the evolving ideas, emotional reactions and opinions throughout the entire fieldwork, without drawing any conclusions.
2	Establishing a regular writing practice	I engaged in writing down notes and key words during the fieldwork at the two Steiner schools, especially during classroom observations and right after informal conversations.
3	Developing a system for organising my memos	I kept objective observations and subjective opinions in separate sections in my diary during my fieldwork, and kept all documents organised and labelled in Evernote.

Table 4.1 Reflexive Writing Exercises in My Research

Also, I was aware of my dual identities of '*outsider*' and an '*insider*'. I was an outsider to the participants in the two Steiner school communities because I was a researcher from the University of Cambridge, who had received undergraduate and postgraduate education from overseas universities. Being an outsider offered me the advantage of appearing less biased in the eyes of my participants since I did not belong to a specific group. In addition, being an outsider encouraged and emboldened me to ask questions I might otherwise have taken for granted as 'shared knowledge' (Hesse-Biber, 2014). At the same time, I was also an insider to the people in the communities, as I was undertaking Steiner teacher training in the UK and shared with them a similar racial and cultural background. Part of the reason I decided to undertake the Steiner teacher training before I entered the field was to better 'experience' the world I would be entering into during my fieldwork. I believe this enabled me to form a closer relationship of trust between myself and the participants. This positionality as an insider allowed me to connect with them in a deep and meaningful way that would not otherwise have been possible. And during the fieldwork I often received comments from people in the communities telling me that they felt 'heard' and 'understood'.

Reflexivity is not to be understood simply as a method which needs to be applied once only in order to iron out any unwanted bias, rather it is a continual process, a state of being in which one gains awareness of one's relation to the 'self'. As one seeks to dissolve perspective bias, one may be inadvertently creating new unconscious bias. This recognition reflects the purpose of reflexivity, not as a tool to rid oneself of subjectivity, rather to gain awareness of

the location of one's subjectivity in relation to the impossibility of achieving an objective perspective. This realisation represents the foregrounding of 'social' within 'social sciences': I would argue that social science must always be 'brought back' to the social by virtue of remaining situated within subjective experience.

4.3 A two-sited Ethnographic Design

I employed a multi-sited ethnographic design; in this case, a two-sited ethnography was conducted. According to Marcus (1995), multi-sited ethnography satisfies the need for a method to analytically explore transnational processes, groups of people in motion, and ideas that extend over multiple locations. The current study aimed to develop an understanding of the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon, with a focus not on an individual case, but on a wider phenomenon that extends across China. Although the two schools I chose as research sites do not represent the entirety of Steiner education across China, studying two different contexts was still helpful in obtaining a wide range of perspectives and generating rich data for the purpose of comparing and contrasting. Having considered the long period of time needed for an ethnographic fieldwork (I spent four months at each school), I decided to limit my fieldwork to two Steiner school communities in China.

4.3.1 Research sites

From a sociocultural perspective, it is important to consider the study context. In this study, I chose urban and rural locations in Western and Eastern China to represent different and wider school contexts. Also, it was interesting to look at and compare Steiner schools from different regions and in different locations.

In the present study, I chose School A in a village on the outskirts of Beijing and School B in Chengdu as research sites for the fieldwork. There were several reasons for this choice. Firstly, Beijing, as the capital city of China, is located in Eastern China; Chengdu, is a major city located in Western China. I felt choosing Beijing and Chengdu would help account for any significant cultural differences found between Western and Eastern China. Secondly, School A is located in a rural village on the outskirts of Beijing, and School B is situated in an urban area of Chengdu. This combination of rural and urban contexts I felt would give my

data depth, since they were not solely concentrated in one locale. Lastly, both schools are relatively established and mature among Steiner schools in China. Their relatively established status provided a greater number of participants and a more evolved ecosystem which I was able to observe and from which I could collect data. These aspects are summarised in Table 4.2. More details about the two schools are provided in Chapter 6.

School	City	Region	Location	Other Comments
School A	Outskirts of Beijing	Eastern China	Rural, in a village	Relatively long history, mature, and large in size.
School B	Chengdu	Western China	Urban	One of the most established Steiner schools in China.

Table 4.2 Research Sites for Data Generation

4.3.2 Field visits and access negotiation

As part of the preparation work for the study, during December 2015, I paid an initial visit to School A. Later, during March 2016, I paid an initial visit to School B in Chengdu. I recorded the visits in my research diary with personal reflections, and summarised them in a document (see Appendix 2 for sample pages).

During my visits, I had meetings with the school managers in both schools to communicate information about my proposed research and fieldwork. The school managers expressed their interest and provided feedback, and I successfully negotiated access to both schools to conduct this research. Following this, in October 2016 I sent an email attaching the consent forms in both English and Mandarin Chinese to the head teacher and the manager of the school in order to seek their permission for me to proceed with conducting the fieldwork (see Appendices 3a and 3b). In this email, I stressed that the aim of the study was to analyse the parents' and staff's perceptions of, and experience in, the Steiner schools, and not to carry out an evaluation of either the school or the school personnel. In the following section I will provide further detail of the practical aspects of my fieldwork study.

4.4 The Fieldwork

4.4.1 The pilot study

In order to prepare for my fieldwork starting in December 2016, I spent a week carrying out a pilot study at School A in Beijing during March 2016. Several goals were achieved during the pilot study. Firstly, I established my role as a researcher and developed a professional relationship with the school. Secondly, I piloted the methods for data generation that I had proposed (see Section 5.1), including formal and informal interviews as well as class observations. Field notes were taken throughout the period of my pilot study at the school.

Through piloting the methods, I found that the methods would 'fit' the purpose of this study well. At the same time, I also refined and improved the methods I was going to adopt. For example, I learnt to request permission to take notes when some 'golden nuggets' appeared during informal conversations (see Section 5.1.2), rather than taking out a recorder, which could seem intrusive for many people.

4.4.2 The ethnographic fieldwork

I conducted a four-month period of fieldwork at each research site: from December 2016 to April 2017 at School A, and from May to September 2017 at School B¹⁷. At each site, I allowed for a one-month period at the end as a review period. The timeline for the fieldwork is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

¹⁷ All schools in China, including Steiner schools, have two semesters in the school calendar year and two major breaks in between: the winter break (mid-January to mid-February) and summer break (July and August). I had taken the school holidays and breaks into consideration in designing my fieldwork plan. I intended to start my fieldwork in October 2016 so my schedule in the field is more in line with the term time of the schools. The reason why I only started my fieldwork in December 2016 was due to some pragmatic factors, mainly that my doctorate registration report was approved in November 2016.

	2nd Year														
	2016			2017											
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr		May	Jun		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Researcher's Location	Cambridge		Field: School A (China)					China		Field: School B (China)					
Data Generation			Data Generation for School A					Feedback Period		Data Generation for School B					Buffer
Data Analysis				Data Analysis for School A							Data Analysis for School B				
Writing-up															

Figure 4.1 Timeline of the Fieldwork

It was important for me to think broadly and creatively about the ways I could obtain information and evidence. During the fieldwork, upon invitation, I ended up visiting a number of Steiner schools across China, and I also worked as a translator in the Asian Steiner Teacher Conference, where I met some key figures in the Steiner education movement in China and conducted interviews and informal conversations with them. I had planned none of these before my fieldwork, but rather remained open with a reflective attitude, and 'went with the flow'. I also gathered additional information during my fieldwork, which included books and magazines on Steiner education, school newsletters and newspapers as well as information available on school websites and social media platforms for my later analysis and writing.

I conducted ongoing data analysis during my fieldwork. This decision was taken because with ongoing data analysis, I, as the ethnographic researcher, could discover additional themes and decide whether to follow such leads for more intensive investigation (Roper & Shapira, 2000). In addition, as claimed by Robson and McCartan (2016), "Naive researchers may be injured by unforeseen problems with qualitative data. This can occur at the collection stage, where overload is a constant danger" (p.460). Thus conducting ongoing data analysis during fieldwork helped ensure that data overload did not occur, as I was able to keep an eye on data management as well as realising when the point of analytical saturation was reached. The focus in the field was on data generation, but I balanced the time in the field between data generation, data management and data analysis. There was no simple or clear division between these three tasks, as they were all connected and took place simultaneously with my thinking process. In general, I spent the majority of the time on data generation, however, this

also changed over time during the course of the fieldwork.

Other than daily reflections, together with potential changes of plan to be made each evening, carried out by writing extended field notes and a research diary, I also had a several-day *review period* at the end of each month. During this time, I re-examined the current design and schedule of data generation and data analysis, re-evaluated whether the planned approach was acceptable to those I was working with, and made decisions accordingly about going forward. I also had conversations with some 'critical friends', both inside and outside the field, with whom I made connections¹⁸. For example, I made changes to the interview schedule and observation plan, and decided whether I should increase or decrease the amount of data I was generating through observations and interviews, respectively.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

I found that there was no existing code of conduct for incoming researchers in the Steiner schools in China during my pilot study. Therefore, in the current research, I employed ethical considerations in conformity with the guidelines laid out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2012). This was undertaken with special consideration of the cultural specificity of the Chinese context, one example of such specificity would be the preference for informality during interviews as opposed to more formal settings.

4.5.1 Confidentiality and anonymity

I took particular notice of issues concerning consent, protection of participants and confidentiality. I had obtained ethical approval for the present study from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Cambridge before the study was carried out. Information sheets and consent forms were sent out to participants via email in advance to ensure they were fully informed regarding the aims of the study, the procedures and the minimal risk involved, as well as their right to withdraw at any time. At the beginning of each

¹⁸ During my fieldwork, I had professor Xiangming Chen at Beijing University Faculty of Education as my field supervisor. I also had the opportunity to meet and discuss with other researchers at Beijing University Faculty of Education, who acted as the 'critical friends' during my fieldwork.

interview, a signed copy of the written consent form was obtained from the participant (see Appendices 4a and 4b for the interview participant information and consent form). At the end of each session, a debrief sheet (see Appendices 5a and 5b) was provided for each participant.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Audiotapes were used during interviews. The raw data were kept for my own use and that of my supervisor only, and they were all saved in password-protected files. Random names were assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity, as is seen in Table 5.3. In this thesis, gender, parental role and staff role at the school of the participants were disclosed, but other identifying factors were hidden to ensure anonymity.

4.5.2 Ethical issues in ethnography

Ethnography is an iterative method; in which I continually re-evaluated both research questions and strategies in light of my experiences in the field. At each stage of the research, namely, choosing a field site, negotiating access, building rapport, conducting participant observation, analysis, and write-up, I continually re-examined my own positionality (as indicated in Section 4.2.2) as well as emerging ethical issues in order to ensure both the process and product reflected my ethics and theories.

Because ethnographers build knowledge through relationships, they are necessarily part of the situations they study, and they have deep responsibilities to the people with whom they work (Buch & Staller, 2014). In the field, since I continually met new people in new situations, I reminded myself of my responsibility to introduce myself as a researcher and would always obtain consent before using the data. Also I strove to be mindful of my relationships with the people with whom I worked with, making sure they were not simply the *researched*, but rather we were working together to explore this research topic and co-create findings. I also made sure that the participants did not feel 'ripped off' by me as a researcher. Whenever I detected a need during interviews in the course of home visits, I tried my best to help out, whether it was voluntarily offering information or providing after school tuition lessons for their children. At times I helped out in the classroom when there was a staff shortage (see Section 6.3).

I agree with Iphofen that "ethical practice in social research is about being a '*good*' researcher

at the same time as being a '*good*' human being" (2009, p.3). This however, depends what one might mean by '*good*'. For me, being 'good' is about following my internal moral compass with reflexivity. I am aligned with feminist ethics of care, which is a model that emphasises responsibility and caring relationships, rather than more abstract ideas about rights, justice, virtues or outcomes (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

To conclude this chapter, I have provided justification for my research paradigm, and why and how I used ethnography, with ethics taken into consideration. In the following chapter, I will lay out the justification for choosing certain methods for data generation and data analysis and the procedures that I have followed for both data generation and analysis.

Chapter 5 Research Design and Methods

This chapter details the research methods for data generation, data management and data analysis. I provide the justification for the choice of research methods for data generation and data analysis, as well as the detailed procedures I followed for data generation and analysis. Lastly, I reflect on quality assurance, and the strategies I undertook to ensure the quality of this study.

5.1 Data Generation Methods

Multiple methods are commonly used to capture the different angles of a phenomenon during the course of ethnography. There are several classical ethnographic methods that have been traditionally used by anthropologists, as noted by Willis (2000):

Observation, interview and informal interaction. [...] Any one of the constitutive techniques of this ethnographic range of techniques can produce qualitative data, but it is only a combination of them over time that produces sufficient 'quality' data to generate an ethnographic account of a social or cultural form. (p.xiii)

In the current study, therefore, methods that include participant observations, formal and informal interviews were adopted as primary data generation methods in the field. The multiple methods enabled contradictory and complementary perspectives to emerge, creating a detailed description of the phenomenon of 'Steiner Fever' (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004).

5.1.1 Participant observation and field notes

Participant observation

The cornerstone of the ethnographic method, *participant observation*, was developed by Bronislaw Malinowski during his extended stay on the Trobriand Islands during World War I.

Malinowski emphasised the importance of the researchers using themselves as a primary tool for data collection by engaging directly in social life, and then using these experiences to provoke discussion and debate among those studied. Malinowski argued:

[d]irect questioning of the native about a custom or belief never discloses their attitude of mind as thoroughly as the discussion of the facts connected with the direct observation of a custom or with a concrete occurrence, in which both parties are materially connected. (Malinowski, 1922, p.37).

For this reason, in my fieldwork, I often used both 'direct questioning' and 'discussion of the facts connected with the direct observation' in both my formal interviews and informal conversations. One of the aims of conducting participant observations for me was to gain a close and intimate familiarity with the individuals and their practices through intensive involvement with them. This familiarity allowed me to obtain more detailed and accurate information about the individuals and their communities in my research. In participant observation, I 'lived' and 'breathed' the field as an active member of the two Steiner school communities (Jeffery & Troman, 2004), over an extended period of time. To Geertz (1998), this is referred to as 'deep hanging out'.

Participant observation is an active, not passive, process and it requires a very special kind of 'being there' (Buch & Staller, 2014). In addition, I agree that participant observers need to maintain "a dynamic tension" between the separate stance of an observer and the connected, "subjective" stance of a participant, being "neither one entirely" (Wilson, 1977, p.250). Therefore in the field I strove to be watchful and mindful of what is going on, and continually observed with a critical and analytical eye, even while participating in everyday social life.

At the same time, participant observation is a deeply *relational* form of method. The relationships ethnographers develop with people in the field thus determine what kinds of things they are able to say and write about social life afterwards (Buch & Staller, 2014). In addition, participant observation also requires that the researcher "systematically empathise[s] with the participants" (Wilson, 1977, p.259). For this reason, whenever possible, I spent time with my participants as they went about their daily routines, including cooking and eating together, going on walks, participating in local festivals, which I will elaborate in detail in Chapter 6.

Having considered my research questions, theoretical position and what is possible in the field, I began my fieldwork as an *observer-as-participant* (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). This allowed me a good combination of involvement and necessary detachment to remain objective. As I became increasingly familiar with my field site and my informants become increasingly accepting of me, I began to help out as an assistant teacher in some music lessons, and taught English language lessons to some classes. In doing so, my role become more participatory in nature, and gradually evolved into a *participant-as-observer*. I will elaborate more on this role-changing process in Chapter 6.

I have followed the four stages that Howell (1972) suggests for participant observation studies: 1) establishing rapport; 2) immersing oneself in the field; 3) recording observations and data; and 4) consolidating the information gathered and analysing data. These are summarised in Table 5.1.

Participant Observation Phases	Description of my Process
Establishing Rapport	I got to know the members, visited the field before my fieldwork, and maintained rapport with community members.
Immersing Oneself in the Field	I did as the locals did. I made sure that I connected with the parents, teachers and students etc. in the two Steiner communities. As a result, I was seen as a member of the community in both school communities.
Recording Observations and Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recorded field notes Reflexivity journals: I recorded my personal thoughts and feelings about the subject of study. Throughout the fieldwork, I often checked with myself to reflect on how my experiences, ethnicity, race, gender and other factors might influence my research.
Consolidating Information and Analysing Data	I used thematic analysis, which will be elaborated in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Table 5.1 My Participant Observation Phases, Adapted from Howell (1972)

Informed by the above discussions, I conducted participant observations in various contexts in the Steiner communities, including classrooms (totalling around 60 hours in kindergartens, lower school and upper school), teachers' meetings, home visits to families, streets in the

community, school events and festivals, as well as teacher training, whenever I had an opportunity to participate and observe. I followed detailed guidelines on conducting participant observations (e.g. De Walt & de Walt; Hammersley & Atkinson), and made practice notes using this method in classrooms at the Cambridge Steiner school, before heading to my fieldwork in China.

Field notes

Field notes served as a comprehensive, chronological log of my perceptions of everything that had happened in the field. Throughout the fieldwork I recorded field notes in Chinese language, as I wanted to keep the sentences or phrases as close to what participants have said as possible. In the field, I always kept a journal with me, and recorded copious field-jottings in the journal, including quick scribbles on incidents and descriptions. This helped me to capture the immediacy of field experiences in an accurate manner. Then I wrote these notes into a more coherent and detailed account at the end of each day, or on the next day. The discipline of constantly writing field notes helped me to maintain some sort of objectivity when the lines between a Steiner community member (insider) and a researcher (outsider) were blurred.

The field notes I wrote included both descriptive ones, what I observed (who was there, what they were wearing, what happened), as well as analytical ones, which included interpretations, hypotheses or speculations about what was happening. I kept what I observed and my own comments (or analysis) separate by marking my comments with an asterisk (*) in my journal. In this way, the process of ethnographic analysis was ongoing throughout my fieldwork. During data analysis, I coded these notes along with other data. More than just an aid to memory, it provided an audit trail which allowed me to make my analysis explicit. See Appendix 6 for a sample page of my field notes.

5.1.2 Formal and informal interviews

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews

Apart from participant observations, I chose semi-structured one-to-one interviews as a method to generate data for the current study. Combining fieldwork with interviews has

enabled my ethnographic study to move from generalities to specifics, from examining the community as a whole to examining the individual in the community (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

There were several reasons why I chose *one-to-one* interviews. Firstly, the purpose of the study was mainly to understand the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon, and my primary role was thus to gather the participants' perceptions and experience of Steiner education. Interviews, as a form of open-ended, linguistically based approach, were good for gathering in-depth information. Survey research typically excludes, and interview research typically includes, opportunities for clarification and discussion. During an interview, I was able to empower the participant to think of, clarify points and provide opinions, even about issues they had never thought about before. Secondly, the nature of the investigation in this research necessitated developing a rapport with the participants before they were asked questions about various important issues, as their choices and experiences of Steiner education might be personal and sensitive. Through talking to them personally, a closer rapport with them was developed than if I had used other methods like questionnaires. Last but not least, interviewing helped me to develop a sense of connectedness with people, and to avoid me as the researcher becoming alienated from the participants, the researched. This sense of connectedness also helped me to potentially develop a long-lasting relationship with the interviewees during and after my fieldwork.

The interview method I used in this research was *open-ended* interviews. This was because I wanted to explore people's view of reality: to hear what the participants had to say in their own terms rather than to test my own preconceived hypotheses. Thus I proceeded inductively, opening my ears to the voices and perspectives of the participants so that I heard the "unheard" and "unimagined" (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p.19).

The type of interview I conducted in my fieldwork was *semi-structured*, with a specific interview guide, a list of questions that I prepared to cover within a particular interview (see Appendices 7a and 7b for the interview schedule that I developed). The choice of semi-structured interview allowed space for a natural flow of conversation and allowed participants to express their thoughts and emotions freely, compared to a structured question and answer session. I tried to 'go with the flow', seeing where it would take me, rather than disrupting the flow. I was not too concerned about the sequence of these questions, but I

tried to cover all questions in the interview by trying to interject the not-yet-addressed questions at a time when I felt some new space opened up in our conversation. As a result, abundant and rich information was collected for qualitative analysis. In addition, using semi-structured interviews allowed an analysis in terms of commonalities (Gillham, 2005), which helped facilitate the process of drawing out themes during my data analysis. Because of the exploratory nature of the research, I kept the interview guide flexible and adapted it according to each individual interviewee. I was open to asking new questions in each interview. I had an agenda, but it was not tightly determined, and there was room left for spontaneity on the part of myself as a researcher and the interviewee.

I began each interview with a standard form that asked for demographic information such as the participant's marital status and the composition of his/her household. Following this, I began to audio-record the conversation, beginning with questions about their current life situation in the Steiner school. These interviews mainly explored parents' or teachers' choice and experience of the Steiner schools, which included their journey to Steiner education, their lifestyle after joining Steiner communities, their aspirations for, or concerns about, their children and their education. Throughout the interview, I made sure that I always listened to the interviewee with attention, interest, patience and humility, without expressing authoritative opinions or judgments. I paid attention to both what the interviewee said and how he/she expressed it. In addition, I gathered extra-contextual information about the interview setting and how the interview was conducted. All interviews in the fieldwork were audio-recorded.

Sampling for interviews participants

In this research, the interviews were conducted with the school founders, teachers (or members of school staff) who were not Steiner parents, parents who were not teachers, parents who were also teachers. I also engaged with ex-teachers, ex-parents, school mentors from Europe and New Zealand, as well as parents who had considered Steiner education but chose not to participate, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon. I used the snowball method while I was in the field to do the sampling. A total of 55 one-to-one interviews were conducted over a ten-month period of my fieldwork. The number of interviews in each category is illustrated in Table 5.2.

Number of Participants	School A	School B	Others
School founders	1	3	2
Teacher/Staff parents	8	6	0
(Non-parent) teacher/staff	3	5	0
(Non-teacher/staff) parents	8	7	0
School mentors	2	1	0
Ex-parents	3	3	0
Ex-teachers	0	2	0
Parents who have considered but did not choose Steiner education	0	0	1
Total	25	27	3

Table 5.2 Sampling of Interview Participants

In writing the findings chapters, as far as possible, whenever I quote a participant, I will make it clear whether s/he is a parent, or a teacher, or a teacher parent. Although I made an effort to invite a number of non-parent teachers and non-teacher parents for interviews, I would like to remind the readers that, as I have discussed in Section 1.3, there is a great degree of overlap between the teachers and parents: often they will be occupying both roles. As for parents who were not teaching at the school, at some points in their life they probably volunteered at the Steiner school, or were part of the parents' committee at the school, who were in cooperation with teachers to improve the school community. Therefore, in my findings chapters, when I talk about a participant's perceptions and experience of Steiner education as a parent, there may be an overlap with his/her role as a teacher or school volunteer.

These interviews were conducted in homes, staff meeting rooms at school, and in some instances, conference meeting rooms after a conference. I kept the duration of the interviews flexible and adapted to different situations in the field. The duration of the one-on-one interviews varied between 50 minutes and 125 minutes, though on average an interview lasted for 75 minutes. The research participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect

their identity. A summary of the participants is provided in Table 5.3¹⁹, and I will give a more detailed picture of their social and professional backgrounds in Chapter 6.

¹⁹ The age of the participants and their years of involvement in the Steiner school are not listed in order to protect their identities within the Steiner community. I have also omitted the precise date of the data collection for the same reason and only the month of the data collection is provided here. I use 'Mrs' if someone was a mother, and 'Miss' if she was not a mother (yet) at the time of the interview.

I only put down father or mother for those whose child/children was/were studying in a Steiner school at the time of my interview. NA in the column of 'parental role' means his/her child/children was/were not studying in the Steiner school at the time of my interview regardless of whether or not they were a father or mother themselves. Ex-mother/ex-father indicates parents of children that had previously studied at a Steiner School but were no longer with that Steiner school.

The Labels in the table roughly reflect the sequence of collection. Whenever I use quotations of any participant, I will note the label of the interview.

School	Label	Name used in thesis	Parental Role	Role at School	Time of Collection
Pilot study	P1	Julia	NA	School mentor	Mar 2016
School A (Beijing)	A1	Mrs. Zhao	Mother	Staff	Dec 2016
	A2	Mr Qian	Father	Teacher	Dec 2016
	A3	Mr Sun	Father	Teacher	Dec 2016
	A4	Mr Li	Father	Teacher	Dec 2016
	A5	Mrs. Zhou	Mother	Teacher	Dec 2016
	A6	Mr Wu	NA	Teacher	Jan 2017
	A7	Mrs. Zheng	Mother	NA	Jan 2017
	A8	Mr Wang	NA	Teacher	Jan 2017
	A9	Mr Feng	NA	Teacher	Jan 2017
	A10	Mr Chen	Father	NA	Feb 2017
	A11	Mrs. Zhu	Mother	NA	Feb 2017
	A12	Mrs. Wei	Mother	NA	Feb 2017
	A13	Mrs. Jiang	Mother	NA	Feb 2017
	A14	Stephan	NA	School mentor	Mar 2017
	A15	Mrs. Han	Mother	Teacher	Mar 2017
	A16	Mrs. Yang	Mother	NA	Mar 2017
	A17	Mrs. Zhu	Mother	NA	Mar 2017
	A18	Mrs. Qin	Mother	NA	Mar 2017
	A19	Mr You	Father	Manager and teacher	Apr 2017
	A20	Mrs. Xu	Mother	Founder, manager and teacher	Apr 2017
	A21	Mr He	Father	Ex-volunteer (teacher)	Apr 2017
	A22	Mrs. Lu	(Ex) Mother	NA	Apr 2017
	A23	Mrs. Shi	Mother	NA	Apr 2017
	A24	Mrs. Shen	Mother	Administrator	Apr 2017
	A25	William	NA	School mentor	Apr 2017
School B (Chengdu)	B1	Miss Kong	NA	Ex-staff	Mar 2017
	B2	Mr Cao	Father	Founder and manager	May 2017
	B3	Mr Yan	NA	Staff	May 2017
	B4	Mrs. Hua	Mother	Founder	May 2017
	B5	Mr Jin	NA	Teacher	May 2017
	B6	Mrs. Wei	Mother	Teacher	May 2017
	B7	Mr Tao	(Ex) Father	Staff and manager	May 2017
	B8	Miss Jiang	NA	Teacher	May 2017
	B9	Miss Qi	NA	Teacher	May 2017
	B10	Mr Xie	Father	NA	June 2017
	B11	Mrs. Zou	Mother	Teacher	June 2017
	B12	Mrs. Yu	NA	Teacher	June 2017
	B13	Mrs. Bo	(Ex) Mother	Teacher	June 2017
	B14	Mrs. Shui	Mother	NA	June 2017
	B15	Mrs. Dou	Mother	NA	June 2017
	B16	Mr Zhang	Father	Manager	June 2017
	B17	Mrs. Yun	(Ex) Mother	Teacher	June 2017
	B18	Mr Su	Father	Founder and manager	June 2017
	B19	Mr Pan	(Ex) Father	Teacher	June 2017
	B20	Thomas	NA	School mentor	June 2017
	B21	Mrs. Xi	Mother	Teacher	June 2017
	B22	Mrs. Fan	Mother	NA	June 2017
	B23	Mrs. Peng	Mother	NA	June 2017
	B24	Mrs. Lang	Mother	NA	June 2017
	B25	Mr Lu	Father	NA	June 2017
	B26	Mr Wei	Father	Teacher	June 2017
	B27	Mr Chang	NA	Ex-teacher	June 2017
Others	Z1	Mr Ma	Father	Principal and teacher in a Steiner school in Taiwan	May 2017
	Z2	Mr Miao	Father	A Steiner school founder	May 2017
	Z3	Mrs. Feng	Mother	Founder of a tuition centre	June 2017

Table 5.3 Summary of Details of Interviewees

Informal interviews

Other than formal interviews, I conducted ongoing informal interviews (conversations) with people in the Steiner communities including teachers, parents and students. I often used informal interviews during the course of participant observation when I asked participants to discuss their perspectives on ongoing activities.

There were several benefits arising from using informal conversation. Firstly, talking with people informally and sharing and learning about their everyday practices offered some of the richest and most informative moments of my ethnographic fieldwork. In addition, I found that informal conversation provided unplanned and surprising glimpses that allowed me to attend to the world of "everyday encounters" (Poulos, 2008, p.47). By treating these conversations as meaningful, I moved beyond the "rarefied atmosphere of the interview" and explored "people's lives outside the research context" (Freeman, 2004, p.73).

Informal interviews can occur spontaneously, and I was not able to use recoding devices to create an audio or video record of the interview. Thus I took careful notes documenting both the questions I asked and the answers I received for later use. When some 'golden nuggets' appeared, I always requested permission from the participants to allow me briefly to note the topic down and use it formally in my research. I would do this so that people involved in my fieldwork would know I was not always recording their answers when having conversations with them.

In summary, I used participant observation and one-to-one semi-structured interviews in this ethnographic study. In the case of data generation, I tried to seek a balance between formal approaches (e.g. semi-structured interviews, classroom observation) and informal ones (e.g. informal conversation with parents, home visits, and attendance at school events).

5.2 Data Analysis Methods and Procedure

In this section, I indicate the details of my data analysis methods and procedure, and discuss the linguistic considerations and data representation in this thesis.

5.2.1 Thematic analysis

Among the techniques of qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis is very popular and widely used, and can be applied to any form of text, ranging from documents to interview transcripts (Howitt, 2010; Jupp, 2006). In the current study, I employed thematic analysis for data analysis to identify common thematic elements across all my data generated in the field, so as to describe what was happening in the data.

Researchers who use thematic analysis seldom describe their approach in detail, which makes it difficult for other researchers to evaluate the research or adopt this method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Jupp, 2006). In view of this, several scholars (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008) have tried to rectify the above issue through the development of research frameworks. Among these frameworks, Braun and Clarke's (2006) is often seen as the best in terms of confronting the above issue, and is recommended by renowned scholars (e.g. Howitt, 2010; Rogers, 2011). I adopted this framework in my MPhil thesis study, and it served the purpose well and was effective. Thus I used Braun and Clarke's framework in the current research when utilising thematic analysis.

An abductive Approach

Braun and Clarke (2006) generally recommend the inductive approach for interviews. In this way, "the codes fit the data rather than the data fitting the codes" (Charmaz, 1983, p.112). However, I chose an abductive approach because I believe the researcher will always bring a matter of pre-understanding from previous work into his/her own research, either consciously or unconsciously. The abductive approach acknowledges such a phenomenon. Adopting an abductive approach for data analysis allowed me both to take advantage of the knowledge I had gained through previous experience, and to develop my understanding further while exploring newly accumulated data. I ascribe to the view on abduction that is presented by Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009). They propose:

The typical situation for abduction is when we, as social scientists, become aware of a certain class of phenomena that interests us for some reason, but for which we lack applicable theories. We simply trust, although we do not know for certain, that the observed class of phenomena is not random. We therefore start collecting pertinent observations and,

at the same time, applying concepts from existing fields of our knowledge. Instead of trying to impose an abstract theoretical template 'deduction' or 'simply' inferring propositions from facts 'induction', we start reasoning at an intermediate level [-] 'abduction!' (p.709)

5.2.2 Transcriptions and translation

Throughout the study, I used my laptop to maintain, organise, and sort large amounts of evidence. I used the software NVivo to manage most of the data, which included interview transcripts, extended notes on my laptop that were generated each evening during the fieldwork, and biweekly email updates sent to my supervisor. I kept all the rest of the data separately in a password-protected folder on my laptop, which included the scanned copy of the field notes in my notebooks from the participant observation as well as documents collected in the field.

Transcribing interviews

All the 55 interviews were transcribed in the style of intelligent verbatim, which refers to transcribing accurately while editing out false sentence starts, repeated words and filler words, such as 'you know' and 'um'. In this way, the readability of the transcript was enhanced, while the accuracy of the meanings and perceptions shared during the interviews were maintained. Having the interviews transcriptions allowed me to see at a glance an interviewee's views on a certain issue without returning to the recordings every time. Moreover, the transcripts turned out to be extremely useful when categories were selected and quotations were chosen during the process of coding. It would indeed be extremely difficult to conduct a study of this nature without fully transcribing the interviews.

I employed several transcribers who had signed confidentiality agreements. Upon receiving all the interview transcripts, I personally proofread each transcript while listening to each interview recording. This helped me to remain close to the data, while thinking about the potential themes that might emerge during the proofreading process.

Linguistic considerations

In this section I turn to linguistic considerations. I have lived in China for 18 years, Singapore

for eight and the UK for five, and have undertaken professional translation work from Mandarin Chinese to English and vice versa. Consequently, I have a full understanding of Chinese language and I am culturally well informed, as well as having a proficient understanding of the English language and British culture. Yet, it should be noted that the task of translating data arrives with pre-established ethical, methodological, and epistemological implications. Temple (2008) argued that moving between two languages is not a matter of word-to-word translation, rather that different languages are linked to distinctive linguistic repertoires, cultural scripts, forms of expression, and autobiographic memories. Therefore, researchers should be careful not to treat them as mere technical matters.

I decided to conduct my data analysis in Mandarin Chinese, only afterwards did I translate into English the interview excerpts needed for inclusion in this thesis. As Larry (2018) states, “Linguistically accurate and sociocultural significant meanings are at risk of being ‘lost in translation’ if they were not analysed in their original language” (p.98). I have chosen to opt for precision of meaning rather than precision of words. The steps I took can be summarised as: 1) data recorded in Chinese language; 2) data transcribed in Chinese; 3) coding and analysing in Chinese language; and 4) reporting findings in English.

I sent a sample of quotations to a bi-lingual Chinese academic, I then cross-referenced his translations with mine, and this process helped me arrive at more accurate translations. I then invited English speaking PhD colleagues in the field of education to read the translated quotations, in order to check the meaning they conveyed was indeed what I had intended. While this does not ensure that all the translations are perfectly representative, they have been given thorough consideration. While this does not entirely remove the chance of imperfect translations, it will have little effect on the validity of the analysis since it is conducted in the language from which it was recorded.

The question of interpretation remains alive and relevant for this study; immediate issues are raised in relation to specific notions that are implicit within Chinese thought but have no precise equivalents in English language. To illustrate my point, an everyday Chinese notion is contained within the word ‘yuán’ (缘), which has no direct translation in English and refers to ‘destiny, luck as conditioned by one's past’, or ‘natural affinity among friends’. It is

comparable to the concept of *karma* in Buddhism. The driving forces and causes behind *yuán* are said to be actions undertaken in previous incarnations of one's life. Clearly such a phrase presents an issue related to an understanding of transcendence, which is not so readily grasped in English. Another example is the notion of 'Tao'.

In many ways, the challenge of how to translate the meaning contained within a seemingly innocuous phrase such as 'yuán' becomes symptomatic of the macro investigation of this study, in relation to remembering the 'essence' and 'spirit' of the meaning contained within concepts. As Lui (1979) notes, "It is the nature of language to codify organic experience into frozen categories. Once jacketed, a growing and vital reality may too easily be stored away as an intellectual abstraction and ultimately forgotten or dismissed" (p.2). I have gone to lengths in this thesis in my attempt to not let terms such as 'Tao' slip into abstraction, rather I have sought, to the best of my ability, to unpack meaning in order to maintain its immanence.

5.2.3 Data analysis procedure

My data analysis was a lengthy, complex and sometimes frustrating process. Since I conducted ongoing data analysis during my fieldwork, data analysis and data generation occurred simultaneously, and themes, codes and insights emerged along the way. Thus my fieldwork was very intense, as I had to 'zoom in' to investigate the nuances of the daily practice of participants, and 'zoom out' to obtain a bigger picture of participants' experience and patterns in the data. Indeed, as pointed out by some scholars (e.g. Miles, 1979; Valli, 1986), the data analysis is considered as the most demanding and least examined aspect of the qualitative research process, yet it is full of complexity.

In the current study, I conducted ongoing data analysis during my 10-month fieldwork, and I continued to carry out data analysis for another 15 months after the completion of fieldwork. My data analysis process involved reading the transcripts a number of times, coding, linking themes, selecting quotations and writing reflective notes throughout the process. Like Creswell (2009), I found data analysis to be a multi-layered and continuous process of reflection, description, interpretation and explanation-building, which moved from specific details to general levels of understanding. Figure 5.1 presents the timetable of my data generation, analysis and writing up.

	2nd Year												3rd Year												4th Year														
	2016						2017						2018						2019																				
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep			
Researcher's Location	Cambridge			Field: School A (China)				China		Field: School B (China)				Cambridge																									
Data Generation				Data Generation for School A				Feedback Period		Data Generation for School B				Buffer																									
Data Analysis				Data Analysis for School A						Data Analysis for School B				Data Analysis																									
Writing-up													Dissertation Writing-up																										

Figure 5.1 Timetable of Data Generation, Data Analysis and Writing up

I conducted data analysis across all my data generated in the field, including interviews, observation field notes, and biweekly email updates to my supervisor. Before I started the analysis procedure, I wrote down my own predictions and assumptions about the existing data, guided by my initial research questions. This was aligned with my abductive approach (see Section 5.2.1). Those predictions were ideas that emerged from my fieldwork experience and that answered the question 'What do I think I might be able to find in my data?' At first, I came up with two topics that I could start developing as possible themes for analysis:

- Reasons why parents and teachers choose Steiner education;
- Experience of parents and teachers of Steiner education.

Concurrent with this whole data analysis process, I wrote brief *analytical memos* to help me refine themes and answer research questions, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). Analytical memos also serve as a place to note surprises and limitations of the study, and for me to experiment with theoretical conclusions.

I followed Clarke's (2006) framework for the analysis procedure for my data analysis (see Section 5.2). I have summarised in Table 5.4 the six steps in details that I took during my analysis. I have also included a screenshot of my data analysis process in NVivo in Appendix 8, as well as the final themes and codes generated through this whole analysis process in Appendix 9.

Steps	Procedure in Each Step that I have Followed	Details
Step 1	I familiarised myself with the data. This included proofreading each interview transcription while listening to each recording, reading the data holistically, as well as noting down initial ideas and emerging themes.	At this stage, I developed some general sense of pattern within the dataset.
Step 2	I analysed each transcript line-by-line, and generated initial codes by coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and collating data relevant to each code.	<p>At this stage, I attached labels to segments of data that depicted what each segment was about. Some of these codes were identified prior to conducting the research based on my review of the literature (e.g., rejecting conventional schooling), while others were emergent (e.g., parental dilemmas about next-stage education). In other words, the codes were generated abductively (as explained in Section 5.2.1).</p> <p>I also kept refining the codes. Should two codes be too similar, I would merge or rearrange them. As a result, 86 codes were generated. I tried to move between 'parts and the whole' of the data (Coffey, 1999) and to avoid the risk of losing the context of the interview or fragmenting important information. During this process, I also shifted between reading transcriptions and listening to interview audio-recordings, as the tone and emotional sentiment of the written and spoken media illuminated different aspects of participants' accounts.</p>
Step 3	I searched for the themes.	I noted the various themes and subthemes that had emerged within the text.
Step 4	I reviewed the themes by checking if they worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.	During this process, I highlighted quotations illuminating the themes for subsequent use in the text. Themes such as 'perceptions about the mainstream education', 'becoming who they are', and 'attitude towards art' were identified with examples drawn from the coded data.
Step 5	I defined the names of the themes through ongoing analysis in order to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis told and to generate clear definitions and names for each theme.	At this stage, I reviewed the original field notes and interview transcripts to ensure that themes reflected the original data in their context. While reviewing the original scripts, I further glimpsed certain contradictions and dilemmas that seemed evident among participants. This included the themes of 'concern about examinations' and 'dilemma about the next stage of education'. Findings on contradictions and dilemmas are explored in detail in Chapter 9.
Step 6	I engaged in the process of writing up, which in itself was the final opportunity for analysis, and produced the finding chapters.	I started by working in a separate word document to 'sort material into categories', extracting sentences and utterances from each transcription and pasting them under the subheading I had assigned. This process was a 'circular procedure' (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998) that involved considerable refinement and modification of categories as I made decisions about what 'counted' in each. I then engaged in the writing up process.

Table 5.4 Six Steps I Took for Data Analysis

5.2.4 Data representation

Participants' own words were relied upon whenever possible, and quotations from interviews were included at length in the findings chapters: Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Out of respect for participants' words and to reduce potential errors in communicating the thoughts of others, I have used quotation in addition to paraphrasing. However, when presenting quotations in my findings chapters, for the sake of clarity and readability, I have engaged in 'smoothing' in some accounts through the addition of grammatical terms (indicated by square brackets) and the omission of obvious repetitions or pauses (indicated by ellipses). See Appendix 10 for the transcription convention used in this study. I have occasionally used numbers or phrases such as 'the majority of', 'a number of' and 'several', to identify how many participants made similar references or used certain words or phrases. I have used this notion of 'frequency' descriptively rather than statistically.

Quotes and excerpts

Having clarified these choices regarding data representation, another important decision was the selection of the quotations and excerpts that were to be included in the thesis. Quotations refer to a single comment by an individual participant, while excerpts are a copy of part of a conversation. I agree with Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) that the function of quotes is seldom to present the perceptions of an individual, but rather that of a group of people who share the same sentiments. Quotations need to demonstrate and exemplify patterns that have emerged in the research. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) therefore propose that in quote selection the researcher should aim for richness and precision, only using the strongest quotes that clearly show evidence of the point the researcher is trying to describe. It is also important that the selected data allow the voices of the participants to come through (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

Following the above guidelines, I utilised the quotations and excerpts that best reflect the experiences and opinions shared by the participants. This means that in this thesis instead of focusing on including as many quotes (or excerpts) as possible obtained from research participants, the focus has been on ensuring that I present the general views of my participants as richly as possible. In cases in which all participants agreed, the best quote (or excerpt) available has been used; in places where there were different opinions, several

quotes (or excerpts) have been used to amplify this fact. When quotations are sufficient, I have used them; when I feel I needed to include my voice in order to express the conversational nature of the exchange, I have included excerpts. I have employed excerpts sparingly in order to help maintain the general flow of the text.

To conclude, the above process provided the foundation for the following findings chapters. The themes explored in this thesis are the most common ones. Exemplars and cases developed in depth in the findings chapters are particularly vivid examples of themes common across the entire data set. The purpose of data presented in subsequent chapters is not to generalise all Steiner parents and staff in the China, but to signal the choices, perceptions and experiences of, some people in the Chinese Steiner communities.

5.3 Quality Assurance

It is argued that explicit examination of the criteria by which research is assessed is central to the strength of a discipline (Devers, 1999). Consensus about clear-cut criteria for research quality has not been reached regarding qualitative research (Moss, Phillips, Erickson, Floden, Lather, & Schneider, 2009; Stige, Malterud, & Midtgarden, 2009). It is worth noting that the quality criteria traditionally used to evaluate quantitative research (e.g. reliability, validity, generalisability, representativeness, objectivity) may not be meaningfully applicable to qualitative studies (Willig, 2008). For the current research which is qualitative, I adopted the evaluation criteria based on trustworthiness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability, proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), as summarised in Table 5.5.

	Criteria	Explanation
Trustworthiness	Credibility	Confidence in the 'truth' of the findings.
	Transferability	Whether the findings have applicability in other contexts.
	Dependability	Whether the findings are consistent and can be repeated.
	Conformability	The extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not the researcher's bias or interest.

Table 5.5 Quality Criteria

Procedures were used to meet the four criteria in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with people in the two Steiner school communities, and through methodological triangulation, which will be elaborated later. Transferability was established by providing a clear, detailed and thick description of the methodology and data generated from field experiences. Dependability was addressed by using the same data collection protocol with each interview. Conformability was addressed by keeping a research diary and an audit trail that included audiotapes of data generated, transcripts and documents that recorded the identified themes.

5.3.1 Triangulation

I have taken triangulation of the four different types into account in the present study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Methodological triangulation (i.e. combining different research techniques to address the same questions) was achieved by generating data using multiple methods. Data triangulation (i.e. combining different data sources obtained using the same research techniques) was addressed by conducting interviews with a variety of participants. Space triangulation (i.e. using cross-cultural approaches to minimise parochialism) was achieved by conducting ethnographic work at two sites, one rural site in Eastern China and one urban site in Western China. Lastly, combined levels of triangulation (i.e. collecting data from multiple stratified sources) was addressed by generating data both from people inside and those outside the school communities, people who opted for Steiner education and people who knew about Steiner education but were not supportive of it.

5.3.2 Generalisability

I agree that generalisability is an almost non-existent possibility in this qualitative study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). Each ethnography is unique: it describes and analyses aspects of a particular social setting and social world, and is bounded in time and space (Atkinson, 1992). Also, as is articulated by Wainwright (1997),

The aim of the qualitative research is not to produce a representative and unbiased measurement of the views of a population, but to deepen his or her understanding of a social phenomenon by conducting an in-depth and sensitive analysis of the articulated consciousness of actors in that phenomenon. (p.13)

In this study, it was difficult to make generalisations based on ethnographic research, partially because ethnography does not use representative sampling. However, I found ethnography to be very effective in identifying what is shared and what is unique among the people in the two Steiner communities. With the deep immersion in the two Steiner school communities, I was able to gain nuanced insights into, and in-depth understanding of, the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon.

5.3.3 Member checks

I strengthened the methodology through the use of member checks, namely, by asking the participants to check their responses and to clarify their answers in order to avoid ambiguous interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My strategy with member checks was divided into two parts. Firstly, during the formal and informal interviews, as far as possible, I clarified with the interviewee whenever things were ambiguous. At the end of each interview, I also summarised what I had understood in the interview to seek their confirmation of my interpretation of what they had shared with me. Secondly, at the end of my period of data generation at each school, I gave a brief presentation on my early findings to the Steiner school community. Not only did they have the opportunity to affirm or challenge my early themes and findings, but they could also gain and learn from my findings to the benefit of the community.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have laid out the justification for choosing certain methods for data generation and data analysis and the procedures that I followed for both data generation and analysis. I have concluded the section by paying attention to the quality assurance of this study. To summarise, a range of decisions have been made in both Chapters 4 and 5, and they are summarised in Table 5.6.

		Decisions Made
Overarching Question		What is at stake in the <i>feverish</i> manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?
Research Questions		Three research questions have been asked to achieve the aim: RQ1: What is the reasoning and decision-making process for parents and teachers in selecting Steiner education over mainstream education? RQ2: What are parents' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of Steiner education? What contradictions and dilemmas arise and how are these dealt with by parents and teachers? RQ3: How do parents and teachers perceive the relationship between Steiner education principles and traditional Chinese values?
Research Stance		'Two-eyed seeing': with one eye situated in the traditional Chinese way of knowing, and the other eye with the Western tradition.
Research Design		Two-sited ethnography Research sites: School A (in Beijing) and School B (in Chengdu)
Methods	Data Generation	Participant observation Interviews: Semi-structured interviews: to provide opportunity for both the participants and the researcher to construct meanings underlying their involvement with Steiner education. Informal interviews
	Data Analysis	Thematic analysis with an abductive approach
Quality Criteria		Trustworthiness , which includes credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity using research diary The research diary ensured reflexivity regarding the researcher's role throughout the research, and will act as a means of quality assurance.

Table 5.6 Decisions Made for the Current Study

I would like at this stage to add a retrospective note to my methodological chapters (Chapters 4 and 5). Throughout the development of my thesis I have gained awareness of questions related to paradigmatic values (see Section 4.1 for my thinking related to such questions). What has become more and more apparent to me throughout my research and writing up my discussions is the need for a greater reflexivity towards all the academic models which are taken for granted. As I begin to reflect on my methodology, particular the section on quality assurance (Section 5.3), I am aware that I risk maintaining an intellectual schism within my research, with one foot seemingly rooted in conventional academic models and one foot aiming to escape and think beyond those very models. With this in mind, I can only be open about the internal paradoxical relationships contained within this thesis with regard to my specific use of triangulation and trustworthiness in quality assurance and a theoretical approach which seeks to critique and even undermine such positions.

In order to perceive the hidden structures contained within different approaches it is perhaps useful to consider Adorno's message of "standing in solidarity with metaphysics at the moment of its downfall" (2015, p.401). My approach has been one of dialectical apperception throughout, which is to consider opposing positions side-by-side and interrelated. I believe this approach can help protect from the mistake of naïvely confusing one's intention to move beyond a particular paradigm with what has been actually achieved. It is, of course, no small task to entirely redesign research methodologies which are immune from the very aspects one is attempting to escape, an endeavour worthy of its own doctoral thesis.

Chapter 6 Setting the Scene: Ethnographic Accounts of the Two Schools

Having introduced the broader context in Chapter 2, this section provides the ethnographic accounts of the local contexts of the two particular Steiner schools, on which the present thesis focuses. I will start by presenting some demographics shared by both schools, including an overview of the two schools, the schools' parents and teaching staff. I will then turn to the educational practice at the two Steiner schools, paying attention to issues such as cultural adaption. Lastly, how I set off into the ethnographic field and formed relationships with the participants will be presented. This chapter is based on data generated from the interviews, field notes from the participant observations, biweekly email updates sent to my supervisor and documents collected during my ethnographic fieldwork in China.

6.1 The Two Schools: Parents, Teachers and the Steiner Communities

6.1.1 Overview of the two Steiner schools

From kindergarten to high school, both schools are fairly well established, and relatively mature when compared with other Steiner schools in China. Both schools comprise kindergartens (including parent-toddler classes for ages 1.5-3 that run on two days each week, and several mixed-age kindergartens for ages 3-6 that run five days a week) and a lower school (grades 1-8, ages 7-14), and an upper school (grades 9-12, ages 15-18). Both schools have more than 400 students (from kindergarten through to Year 12 in the upper school). These student numbers are roughly similar with what is found in urban state schools. The upper school in Chengdu Steiner School was opened in 2014, whilst the Beijing Steiner school was still undergoing the process of establishing their upper school. These two upper schools are among the very few Steiner upper schools in China.

Gaining admission to either of the two Chinese Steiner schools is not an easy task: the

kindergartens' waiting lists are years long (e.g. five-year waiting list for the Chengdu Steiner school), and the lower schools are even more difficult to enrol in, with many of the places filled by incoming students from the kindergartens. The Chengdu Steiner school has a plan to expand in size, with the addition of a new campus of 1000 students (Interview, B18)²⁰.

The two Steiner schools have relatively high fees: both charge around 40,000 RMB (roughly 4,500 GBP) in tuition fees per year²¹. They offer no regular scholarships for students but occasionally grant some discount in tuition fees to a few students. The schools have their reasons for the fees. A manager of one of the schools explained that Steiner schools received no funding from government or NGOs, and they tried, as far as possible, to use organic, natural materials, and they provided daily healthy organic lunches and often organised outings (Interview, B4).

The tuition fees charged to the full-time students is the primary channel through which income for both schools is generated. Both schools organise workshops and courses throughout the year for adults, which are related to Steiner education and *anthroposophy*, as well as summer camps for children, as another way of making a profit.

In January 2012, the Chengdu Steiner school received an official licence (for the kindergartens and lower/primary school, but not the upper/secondary school) to operate from the Chinese Department of Education. The efforts of many years of "pushing the government to accept alternative education in China" was not in vain (Huang, 2011, p.1). Before this point, the Chengdu Steiner school, like many other Steiner schools in China, was neither given the 'green light' to allow them to operate with a licence, nor were they shut down with a 'red light'. They were operating in a 'yellow-light' zone and the government has had these school on their radar and has been watching and assessing them (Huang, 2011).

The Beijing Steiner school was still in this 'yellow-light' zone during my fieldwork in 2017 and was given the 'green light' in 2019. Some parents appeared unconcerned by the lack of a licence, whilst others worried about the later years of their children's schooling, as they were

²⁰ Readers may refer to Table 5.2 which lists further details of the interviewees.

²¹ The Chengdu Steiner school, for example, has raised its tuition fees from 400 GBP in 2008 to more than 4,500 GBP today, the inflation rate in China across these ten years needs to be taken into consideration.

not sure that academic credentials would be recognised outside the Steiner education system. Chapter 9 elaborates more on parental dilemmas.

The Beijing Steiner school

Beijing, the capital of China, is the second largest Chinese city by urban population (of over 20 million) after Shanghai. It is the nation's political, economic and cultural centre. Beijing is known as the education centre of China: it has an extensive number of colleges and universities, and is home to educational experiments and innovation.

The Beijing Steiner school was founded in 2010 by a group of parents, teachers and Steiner education enthusiasts. In 2011, the school moved to a village on the outskirts of Beijing, about 60 kilometres from the city centre of Beijing. Unlike the city centre packed with high-rise apartments and office towers, this village is filled with tiny, single-storey houses along winding alleyways. In the course of a few years, around 200 families from all over China (usually urban China) had moved into the village and had enrolled their children in this school (Interview, A24). As a result, the village expanded tremendously.

The Chengdu Steiner school

Chengdu, unlike Beijing, as one of the five biggest Chinese cities, is located in the centre of China. This city has a reputation of being easy-going, friendly and vibrant, it is home to many foreign residents. It is famous for its tolerance of divergent traditions and views, as the inhabitants have come from different cultural backgrounds and speak various dialects. Historically, it has had a reputation for anti-authoritarianism and has been the site of several political uprisings.

The Chengdu Steiner school is one of the largest in terms of students and staff numbers. It was founded in September 2004, in a small farmyard on the outskirts of the city Chengdu. Today, the school has grown into a 30-acre beautiful and tranquil campus within the neighbourhood of concrete, high-rise buildings. The campus generally feels warm and cheerful, with a bamboo grove, a pagoda and a U-shaped elementary school building centred around a rock garden. In one corner of the playground, there is also an ink-stained traditional Chinese calligraphy studio.

Comparing the Two Schools

The following table summarises the two Steiner schools in terms of geographic location, maturity, size, licence status, education offered etc.

School	School A	School B
City	Outskirts of Beijing	Chengdu
Region	Eastern China	Western China
Location	Rural, in a village	Urban
Year Founded	2010	2004
Maturity	Relatively mature	One of the most mature Steiner schools in China.
Education Offered	Kindergarten to Year 8 (Age 14), Upper School in construction	Kindergarten to Year 12 (Age 19)
Size	More than 300 families	More than 500 families
Licence Status	Not licensed during my fieldwork in 2017 and became licensed in 2019	Obtained licences for the kindergarten and lower school, but not for the upper school

Table 6.1 The Two Steiner Schools as Research Sites

Based on my observations and interviews, I could see that there were many formal similarities between the two Steiner schools, such as the educational approach and the interior design of the classrooms. Socially, the background of parents and teachers were largely coherent in both schools and their views on the challenges and dilemmas concerning the future of the students were broadly similar.

There were several differences between the two schools, for example, at the Beijing Steiner school most families lived in the same village, in Chengdu the families were more dispersed among the near by neighbourhoods. The Chengdu Steiner school appeared more established than the Beijing Steiner school, for example, the Chengdu school had obtained its licence, had a training centre that offered Steiner teacher training and an established upper school. In contrast, the Beijing was not yet licensed, offered no Steiner teacher training and its upper school was in the process of development (at the time of my fieldwork).

6.1.2 Parents and teachers

An analysis of the interview sample from the two Steiner schools in Beijing and Chengdu indicates that most participants were from the 'middle class' in China. Though the 'middle class' is by no means a clearly recognised entity in China, I place these parents in this category on the basis of their professions, educational background and powers of consumption, as I have discussed in Section 2.1.3. Most of the parents I knew lived in double-income households, and all devoted enormous amounts of their time and energy to the education of their child; some of them had, or were expecting, a second child since the One-Child Policy was relaxed in 2013²². Many of the parents and families travelled for leisure, some owned private cars and had at least one home somewhere else in the country, although they might be renting the one in which they were living in the school neighbourhood during the time I was conducting my fieldwork.

It should be noted that although the majority of Steiner parents were from the middleclass, they were not those extremely wealthy parents who sent their children to international schools in China, which cost around GBP 35,000 per year. The majority of parents I spoke with were making special efforts to generate income so as to send their children to a Steiner school. During my time in the field, at times when children were going on a school trip to places such as Xi'an, they had to make a fundraising project in order to raise money for their school trip. Occasionally, there were a few children from families that were not so economically affluent and were getting bursaries from the schools.

The two Steiner schools attracted families (parents and students) as well as teachers from across this vast country. The fact that the majority of the families were not from the local area, meant the school community was extraordinarily diverse. People came from different religious backgrounds (such as practising Buddhists and Taoists), while many practised no specific religion but identified as spiritual. Generally Steiner parents were educated to graduate level, although some did not have a college degree. The occupational make-up of the parents revealed a greater degree of similarity and overlap. For example, the varieties of occupation of the interviewed parents tended towards white-collar employment in private

²² In November 2013, China announced the decision to relax the One-Child Policy. Under the new policy, families could have two children if one parent, rather than both parents, was an only child.

companies, low- and mid-ranking civil servants, self-employed businessmen, full-time mothers and engineers. The majority of parents were born between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s and were Han Chinese²³. Most Steiner pupils came from traditional nuclear families; however, there were a few single parents. What united Steiner parents was the incredible efforts they had made to migrate, often having given up their homes and jobs, in order to send their child to this Steiner school, as will be elaborated in Chapter 8.

The staff at the two Steiner schools comprised class teachers, subject teachers and other staff including administrative, logistics and management staff. The class teacher usually took the same class from the first grade and continued with it until the eighth grade. S/he was responsible for the main subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography etc.), which were taught in the 'main lesson', a two-hour period at the beginning of each day. Subject teachers taught other subjects, such as foreign languages, music, craft, and *eurythmy*.

Only a few teachers had any work experience in state schools; some had worked in other Steiner schools previously. Before working in these two Steiner schools, the occupational background of the teaching staff had been diverse: they included university graduates, businessmen, corporate professionals and housewives. Most teachers did not have teaching qualifications, neither state teaching qualifications nor Steiner teacher training qualifications²⁴.

As I have discussed in Section 1.3, at both schools teachers played a dual role, about two-thirds of them were also parents. Their children were studying at the same school at which they were working. What was more fascinating was that many of them had first come to the school as parents interested in Steiner education without considering becoming a teacher at all, but as their interest in Steiner education grew, some months or years later they found themselves part of the school as a volunteer, a part-time teacher, or a full-time teacher.

²³ Han Chinese (also called Han) is an ethnic group from China, 92 per cent of the Chinese. Han Chinese have the highest concentrations in the Eastern Provinces of China, particularly in the Hebei, Jiangsu and Guangdong regions.

²⁴ According to the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Yiwu Jiaoyu Fa*), the teaching staff employed by schools in compulsory education are obliged to hold teacher certification (*jiaoshi zige zheng*) as proof of professional competence. Since the local education bureau called for an increase in the proportion of 'teachers with the teacher certification' (*chizheng jiaoshi*), both Steiner schools had encouraged the existing staff to register for the teacher certification examination.

The Steiner schools did not place particular value on the applicants' academic qualifications, or work experience when selecting teachers; instead the schools emphasised that candidates must have a genuine interest in Steiner education, identify with the school's pedagogy and enjoy working with children. From my observations, what this recruiting strategy seemed to facilitate was a loyal and enthusiastic community of teaching staff; however, at times it undoubtedly resulted in inexperienced teachers, who with the best of intentions were placed prematurely into a teaching role. For Steiner schools, it is difficult to compete with the state schools in terms of salaries and benefits when recruiting staff. In addition, many Steiner schools, including the Beijing Steiner school, are located in remote and unfavourable areas. Still, most staff at the two schools appeared content and passionate about working in their school, although the staff turnover rate did not seem particularly low to me.

Gradually a community of parents and staff developed around both schools. Base on my observation, some of these people have slowly integrated themselves into a new lifestyle: visiting farmers' markets, eating and promoting the cultivation of organic food, purchasing natural and hand-made crafts, such as beeswax crayons, some had even started their own organic farms. These families tended to wear clothes made of natural materials and with some traditional Chinese elements. They also often talked about visiting nature reserves in the country and Steiner schools in the Western countries. In keeping with principles of Steiner education, parents kept their children, especially those under 12 years old, away from televisions and other electronic devices, and encouraged them to play outdoors, either in the bamboo woods or the fields. Families were also advised by the schools to eat dinner as a family together at home, and some families enjoyed having other families over for a meal, to cultivate bonds in the Steiner community.

6.2 How are Steiner education principles practised in Steiner schools in China?

Judging from my time spent with them, Steiner education practitioners in China (including Steiner school founders and teachers) had a genuine interest in practising what the principles of Steiner education entails. A great effort was made to invite anthroposophical scholars and senior Steiner teachers from all over the world, the USA, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK in particular, to mentor and to offer courses and workshops at the Chinese Steiner schools.

Teachers at the two Steiner schools in this study formed weekly reading groups to study the books of Steiner or those related to *anthroposophy*. Since 2002, a series of books by Steiner have been translated into Mandarin in both mainland China and Taiwan²⁵. On many occasions parents of Steiner pupils were also invited to participate in these reading groups. Yet, Steiner teachers in China would not necessarily consider themselves to be *anthroposophists* and would rarely refer to themselves as such. There was a feeling amongst teachers that the label of ‘anthroposophist’ felt too prescriptive and dogmatic. At times teachers commented that despite taking a genuine interest in *anthroposophy*, they found some of the academic writing styles difficult to grasp.

The Steiner movement in China has developed so rapidly since 2004 (see Section 1.1), there is some difficulty in recruiting and training enough qualified teachers. This has undoubtedly been a factor that requires acknowledgement as it affects the schools’ ability to implement Steiner practices in a manner they consider ideal. Often when a new Steiner school is established in China it will be run with a shortage of fully qualified staff, and as a result the school will have to make do with employing teachers who lack experience and specific Steiner teaching skills. It should be noted that even though these teachers are less experienced teachers, they have a genuine interest in Steiner education and have often received partial or complete Steiner teacher training as they have gone along with their teaching at the Steiner school.

There are cases when specific Steiner schools, in their quest to gain their official licence, can be understood to have accepted a degree of compromise with regard to the content of their teaching. These compromises often mean the incorporation of aspects of the state curriculum, which interferes with the Steiner curriculum that is taught. In such cases the changing of teaching practices and specific taught content is less ideological, rather it pertains to pragmatism on the schools’ part in their desire to help facilitate the schools’ future. This is, yet, another aspect of Steiner education in China which adds to its complex nature.

²⁵ Steiner’s books which were translated into simplified Chinese and published in mainland China included: Practical Advice to Teachers from Steiner (Steiner, 2013), The Kingdom of Childhood (Steiner, 2014b), Autobiography of Rudolf Steiner (Steiner, 2018). The books which were translated into traditional Chinese and published in Taiwan included: The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy (Steiner, 2002), Study of Man (Steiner, 2010), Theosophy (Steiner, 2011), How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation (Steiner, 2012) and The Foundations of Human Experience (Steiner, 2014a).

6.2.1 Creating educational practices appropriate for China

The Chinese Steiner schools have adopted Steiner educational practices and implemented them in various ways. Part of this process requires the Chinese Steiner schools to find their own cultural identities within the content they teach (Cherry, 2014). The manner in which Steiner education is implemented in China has been a topic that is often discussed and reviewed in meetings and conferences among the Chinese Steiner education practitioners (see Hu, 2017). The Chinese Steiner schools are seeking to design an education that is international, yet essentially Chinese. For example, one question which has often been raised is: how can teachers in China substitute the European histories, songs, fairy tales and children's rhymes with appropriate local counterparts that are relevant to the Chinese people? In Appendix 11, I portray my observations from a main lesson as an illustration of how classes are typically conducted in a Chinese Steiner school²⁶.

Ben Cherry, one of the key individuals in establishing the Chinese Steiner movement spoke about the efforts that were being made by Chinese teachers.

Much has been achieved, for example, by a grass-roots approach to creating curriculum appropriate for China. Research seminars take place in different regions focusing on different aspects of teaching. Each seminar is led by a group of more experienced Chinese teachers and all teachers from the region are invited. This collaboration is then continued in meetings organised by the teachers themselves. (2014, p.19)

There are traditional Chinese practices which have become incorporated into Steiner education in China. During my 10-month fieldwork at the two Steiner schools, various courses and workshops were going on throughout the year, including anthroposophical medicine, I Ching, Goethean Sciences, anthroposophical drama, traditional Chinese painting, Chinese traditional massage for children, anthroposophical rhythmic massage etc. All of these different practices appeared to be combined together in a complementary manner. At the Asian Steiner Teachers Conference that I attended in 2017, 54 workshops were offered

²⁶ In order to maintain confidentiality, I merged some field notes together to create a piece on a day in a Steiner school. I have tried to portray commonalities to create a picture of what a day is like in a classroom in a Steiner school where I conducted my fieldwork. However, I am not claiming this is an entirely typical picture, as there is uniqueness in each classroom, with each teacher, on each day.

during the conference, of which the majority were related to Steiner education or *anthroposophy* and some related to traditional Chinese practices, including traditional Chinese painting and philosophies.

6.2.2 Flexibility of interpretation in Steiner schools

Often the Steiner schools I visited in China felt very traditionally Chinese, even more so, according to my experience, than Chinese state schools. At times I encountered portraits of Confucius and images of the Taoist *Yin/Yang* symbol in the Steiner classrooms. I also observed traditional practices, such as classic calligraphy and traditional art of Chinese paper cutting (*jianzhi*) being taught at Steiner schools. Certain Chinese Steiner schools appear to have adopted a more orthodox approach and in many regards the classroom interiors and teaching methods would be hard to tell apart from the European Steiner schools, so closely have they followed the settings of European schools. Following my observations and conversations, however I was led to understand that these more orthodox schools in China should be considered the exception and the majority of Steiner schools in China have adopted a more flexible approach to interpretation of *anthroposophy*.

From speaking to Steiner practitioners and attending conferences I could see that many of the Steiner schools around China incorporated a lot of Chinese values and practices into their educational practice. Some schools, instead of Waldorf watercolour painting, they practised traditional Chinese painting. For some of the teachers and parents I interviewed, they felt that even if the specificities of the teaching content differs in Chinese practices and Steiner teachings, their *essence* remain aligned. Of course, some Steiner educators in China may suggest that the integration of traditional Chinese aspects into Steiner education is not in keeping with the original teachings.

This notion of *essence* is something I explore further in Chapter 11. At this stage it is sufficient to say that the question of how strictly Steiner practices should be followed remains a moot point. Of course any form of teaching will be subject to differing interpretations which may lead to very differing practices. If we consider Steiner's teachings as a form of interpretation themselves, which seeks to understand the human spirit, then it appears to me that both a more orthodox approach, which seeks to maintain and conserve Steiner principles, and a flexible approach, which seeks new interpretations, should both be a part of the wider

conversation within the Chinese context.

The specific situation of Steiner education seeking a relevant articulation in the Chinese context can be considered a valuable opportunity in which Steiner practitioners can re-familiarise and re-evaluate different interpretations of Steiner practices. It offers a unique context from which to discuss and debate the importance of what lies behind the teachings in the first place. That is to say, the conversation surrounding interpretation of the *essence* of Steiner's educational values and how this can be translated into specific content in order that it remain culturally and socially relevant to the Chinese context, can be considered a key aspect of what it means to keep the essence of Steiner education *alive*.

6.3 Building Relationships with Teachers, Parents and Students

In this section, my account begins with the contexts in which I formed relationships with the schools and started my fieldwork. Most staff and children that I encountered were friendly towards me. A few teachers openly agreed to let me sit in their class to make some observations, but several others refused my request for classroom observation. Clearly there was space for trust to grow between us. The particular context of the Beijing Steiner school being unlicensed (at the time of my fieldwork) meant that many people were reasonably cautious; they did not want the school to have too much exposure to media or local authorities. The first interview that I conducted with a teacher (Interview, A4) at the Beijing Steiner school was just such an example (see Appendix 12 for the detailed accounts which are developed from my field notes dated December 2016). At each school site, it took me a few weeks to gradually develop a sense of trust that allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews and classroom observations.

I visited the schools almost every day, until I felt I became a part of the landscape. For example, Mr Feng, a music teacher at the Beijing Steiner school whose music lesson I had observed, asked me whether I would like to teach some songs to his students. I enjoy playing music and accepted this invitation, as I realised this would be a great opportunity to build rapport with students and teachers. As a result, I soon became Mr Feng's 'informal assistant'. At times I was invited to teach a piece of choral music to the students, I was also asked to share with the class some of my travel stories. Gradually we developed an informal pattern:

Mr Feng spent two-thirds of the time teaching while I conducted my observations, and then I took over to carry on the rest of the lesson with some pieces of music.

During this time, I noticed a shift in my role: I was no longer a silent, invisible researcher and observer, I had also become an informal teacher and friend to many students at school. As I formed a friendly relationship with some students, I started to gain trust from their class teachers too. Soon after, a few class teachers who had previously refused my request to conduct observations now happily invited me to observe their lessons. What was more, a few class teachers invited me to help teach in their main lessons. Over the course of two weeks, I was part of several lessons in a range of classes, for example, teaching English poems to Class 4 and leading some singing for Class 8 as part of the preparation for their upcoming drama performance. On occasions I was invited by teachers to visit their homes for informal dinners.

During that month, I also became informally involved in teaching some of the class 6 (age 12) English language lessons at the Beijing Steiner school. As time progressed, I began spending more and more time talking to Class 6 students, we would sometimes walk home together after class, on occasion I was invited to attend dinners at their homes. These children were often also very curious about my background, asking me about my life in Cambridge. Gradually I felt I was no longer perceived as an authority figure, but rather as someone these students could trust and share their thoughts and feelings with. The relationship I developed with children and teachers, in turn, helped me to develop relationship with the parents.

Over time, as my presence became known by more people in the village, I had more and more dinner invitations to the families. Gradually, my relationship with many parents and teachers deepened as they began to open up to me. Visiting families and meeting parents and teachers became to be an important component of my research, providing greater insight into their personal biographies. My experiences with the Chengdu Steiner school community was similar to the Beijing school, in that relationships with teachers and parents were largely established through lunches in the school, home visits and informal conversations.

Emerging voices

The time spent building relationships with my participants was very important for the more

formal parts of this study. I also believe that it communicated an ethic of care and interest in their lives that remaining aloof would not have conveyed. More importantly however, it felt natural and I enjoyed this type of interaction with the parents, teachers and students. As each day passed, the parents' and teachers' stories unfolded, and their voices strengthened. We often revisited stories told during these many informal conversations during later interviews, or the other way around, revisited stories told in interviews during later informal conversations. They gathered the courage to provide more details, or even confessed to untruths they had initially told.

Building trust and deepening relationships cannot happen in a few weeks, and so my study benefitted significantly from taking the time to immerse myself in people's lives in these two school communities. It is my firm opinion that uncovering perceptions and experiences to the degree as I was able to at the two schools could not have been done in a shorter time frame.

Chapter 7 Why Do Parents and Teachers Choose Steiner Education?

In this chapter, which is the first findings chapter, I investigate parents' and teachers' accounts how they came to choose Steiner education. This is linked to research question 1, which is: *What is the reasoning and decision-making process for parents and teachers in selecting Steiner education over mainstream education?* This chapter explores parents' and teachers' reasoning and the following chapter, Chapter 8, examines their decision-making process.

Drawing primarily upon interviews with parents and teachers, this chapter reveals the complexities of the accounts that parents and teachers produced when discussing their educational choice of the Steiner schools in the context of the current constrained circumstances of the Chinese education system. Through the data analysis process I have presented in Chapter 5, I found the interplay between *push* factors away from the state school and *pull* factors towards Steiner education visible in the parents' and teachers' accounts of their choice of Steiner education. There are a number of themes under each category of *push* and *pull* factors. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the *push* factors that led parents out of the state education. The second part introduces the *pull* factors that led parents and teachers into the Steiner pedagogy. Following this, I present how *push* and *pull* factors relate to each other and the interplay between them in parents' decision-making process. Lastly, I discuss the dialectics of *push* and *pull*.

7.1 The *Push* Factor: Turning away from the Current State Education System

Being alternative and outside-the-system (*tizhiwai*) schools, the two Steiner schools at the edge of the two cities Beijing and Chengdu, and their Steiner pedagogy are a far cry from that of the mainstream, inside-the-system (*tizhinei*) schools, as I have outlined in the previous chapter, Chapter 6. Both Steiner Schools provide education for about 500 students from kindergarten through to senior high (between the ages of 3 and 18), and the lessons are

conducted in creative ways, with plenty of music, storytelling and play. The campuses are cheerful, decorated with students' art and craftwork projects. In the Chengdu Steiner school in particular, some small children were often found clambering around in the branches of a tree in a corner of the playground. Both schools attracted parents and teachers from this city, and even from all around China, some at the cost of changing jobs and moving house to this region, with some even moving their whole family including grandparents. Why did these parents and teachers choose this kind of education?

For many parents and teachers, the factors leading towards the decision to choose Steiner education were marked by a greater number of reasons *pushing* them away from the current state system. When I asked parents in my fieldwork for their initial reasons for wanting their children to study at a Steiner school, the most common account they gave was based on critiques of state education. Often in an unreserved and resolute tone, they expressed disappointment with the state school system. The majority of parents whom I interviewed considered the mainstream education to be very factual, test-oriented, stressful and competitive. They did not want to send their children to this education system, and thus they looked for alternative ways of educating their children, and some had found Steiner education.

7.1.1 Parents' and teachers' perceptions of state education

Across the discourses of the Steiner parents and teachers whom I interviewed, there was an implied perception and criticism of the state education as providing too much pure indoctrination of instrumental knowledge and being too examination-oriented. According to these parents and teachers, they saw the state education system as an overly simplified practice of 'education for knowledge' (*zhishi jiaoyu*) and 'education for examinations' (*yingshi jiaoyu*). Some even expressed strong feelings of helplessness with regard to the state education system.

Too examination-oriented and instrumentalised

Some parents disclosed their concern about the state education placing too much emphasis on accumulation of factual knowledge, which for them was not the most important thing about education. For example, Mrs. Fan, a mother shared the view that 'education isn't just about

knowledge, but also about becoming a real human being, and how to conduct life. I believe knowledge is not the most important thing' (Interview, B22). Within this context we can view 'knowledge' as more superficial in its nature compared to 'understanding' in that we are capable of having knowledge of things we do not understand, especially if things are memorised parrot-fashion for examination purposes. It becomes useful to compare the relationship between knowledge and memorisation with understanding and learning; the latter (understanding and learning) implies an inherent relational aspect. We learn how to understand ways to apply knowledge in real-life contexts. Knowledge without understanding, that is, memorisation, it can be argued, misses the purpose of learning in the first place, which is to apply it to our lived experience.

Many parents (such as A17, B14, B23, B26) also revealed their deep concern about the number of examinations their children had to face in the state system: some wondered, 'what's the point of education solely for the sake of passing examinations?' (Interview, B14); some feared that the school was going to 'turn the child into an examination-taking mechanical machine' (Interview, A17) but one who lacks self-confidence, independence and autonomy. For example, Mrs. Zheng, a mother, revealed that after witnessing the school experience of her friend's daughter, she decided to send her own child to a Steiner school.

There were loads of examinations waiting when you start [primary] school. My friend's child had homework to do on the first day, which was to write an essay of 150 words... That means when you were in the final year of kindergarten, you had to learn to read the Beijing Evening Newspaper (*Beijing wanbao*), or the Beijing Youth Newspaper (*Beijing qingnian bao*) inside out, and your English had to reach a certain standard, your mathematics had to reach certain grades, only then are you allowed to start school! So it's about the madness of the parents, it's the madness of the system! (Interview, A7)

Similarly, Mrs. Dou, a mother who had experienced the Chinese education, from kindergarten to graduate school, criticised the state system's heavy emphasis on homework and assessment whilst neglecting the essence and purpose of education. She decided to remove her son from state education into a Steiner school.

There are too many flaws in the state education system. Some are pretty obvious. In fact, they are not working with children in the light of the essence/purpose (*benzhi*) of education,

instead children were pressured with too much homework and too many assessments. If children spend their childhood like this, and up to junior-high and senior-high schools, they have already lost something [important] in this state system. (Interview, B15)

The point concerning the loss of the essence/purpose (*benzhi*) of education in the state system was also echoed by many others. For example, one father, Mr Qian, was both a parent and a teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, and used to teach in a mainstream school in China. He revealed his disillusion with the factual knowledge- and grades-centred system he experienced during his 12 years teaching in the state system. He did not see the 'character development and spiritual growth' in children in the state school and thus turned towards Steiner education.

Being in the [state] system gradually separated me from what originally led me to be a teacher: I initially hoped the children would have character development and spiritual growth. But all the teachers cared about were grades. Many children suffered hugely. For example, some children didn't absorb factual knowledge, then what? Then we worked extra hours, after school, one-to-one tuition, we had to make them get it. If they still didn't get it, then they would be held back from physical education lessons, music or art lessons. (Interview, A2)

He also went on to criticise the ranking issues that arose in his teaching experience, which was echoed by many others.

Ranking takes place all the time and everywhere, within the class and across different classes... Our job as teachers is solely about improving students' grades. This score also determined your capability as a teacher. (Interview, A2)

Many parents and teachers felt that there was far too much competition, partially as a result of the ranking system in state schools, which they were concerned would have a negative impact on their children's holistic development and enjoyment of learning. In addition, the examination-oriented education system placed children in a hierarchy in the social network of the classroom. Meanwhile, the teachers were also placed into different capability rankings based on their students' grades.

Many parents wanted their children to be educated in an environment in which they were not solely prepared for the job market. One former teacher parent, Mr Chang, used the analogy of mass-produced technology and industrialisation to illustrate how they felt that 'human beings are moulded into units of technology and knowledge' (Interview, B27). Parents often expressed the feeling that the current education system only allowed children to be treated as 'cogs within a system' and was unable to nurture the more nuanced aspects of the human condition, such as creativity, care and cooperation.

Too much pressure and conformity

As a result of the excessive amount of homework and assessments, several of the interviews parents and teachers (such as A11, B15, B17) admitted that the children in a state school were facing intense pressure. One mother, Mrs. Yun, revealed the reason that she withdrew her son from a state school was due to the amount of pressure and the resulting lack of balance in his life, and she ended up finding a Steiner school for her son and moved the whole family to the Steiner school community. 'My child [in a state school] has the experience of undergoing lessons and homework every day, with a lot of pressure. I would hope to find other ways to help him, to be more balanced' (Interview, B17).

'Too much, too soon' was a common theme parents often discussed, for example, Mrs. Dou stated:

There was just too much pressure, and everything was too soon. It's like a miniature version of Chinese society, everything is too much, too soon - all sorts of after-school tuition classes (*peixun ban*), early education centres (*zaojiao jigou*). (Interview, B15)

As we can see, according to this mother, the pressure is not only exerted by teachers within the school, but also by parents, which perhaps relates to the overall atmosphere in contemporary Chinese society. This point was echoed by another parent, Mrs. Zhu,

There are many parents around me who are in the state system, and I can tell they feel really insecure. From kindergarten years they would only allow their children to play for one or two days every week, even when playing football, they could only *play* if they had a coach. (Interview, A11)

According to some parents and teachers (such as A7, A13, A23, B18, B21), children were criticised or punished by teachers in state schools for either not finishing homework or failing the examinations or violating the class rules. Physical punishment or even abuse was quite common in the state kindergarten and schools. Mrs. Zheng described an occasion when her son refused to go to school within a month of entering a primary school, as he experienced a lot of pressure from the teachers and was even physically and verbally abused.

He was only seven. After only a month, he started to refuse to go to school... In the worst week, he had an emotional breakdown almost every day. Then he would hit his head against the wall, yeah, it was really shocking!... We investigated and found that the school required the pupils to have good grades so as to attract top pupils. Then the salaries of teachers were also linked to pupils' results, and thus teachers were under a huge amount of pressure, and consequently exerted enormous control over the children. Every single child's head was knocked with a steel whistle by the physical education teacher... It's not unusual. The classroom was filled every day with insulting language and verbal abuse. (Interview, A7)

Parents complained that there was too much about conformity. Not only was their children's individuality not acknowledged, but also they would be punished because of their individuality. From the various accounts, excerpts from two interviews conducted with Mr He and Mrs. Xi clearly illustrate the struggles of children experiencing the pressure to conform at school as well as the parents' disillusion and anxiety about continuing to send their children to the state schools.

EXCERPT 1: He was fine in the first year: every day he was in a rush, happy, and couldn't wait to go to school... About a term or two later... he started to refuse to go to bed, and dragged when it came to getting out of bed. It was because he loved digging into questions, asking, why this and why that? [which the teacher did not like.] ... he was often being punished, by being asked to stand outside the classroom... He began to ask himself: 'Why am I different? Why don't I fit in?' ... We wondered whether we could find a school or an educational model that could be more inclusive/tolerant (*baorong*) of him. (Interview, A21)

EXCERPT 2: [When my son was 5], within a year, he became a problem child (*wenti ertong*). He refused to interact with others, and often shut himself off, or frequently blew up... I was so sad... There are more and more sensitive children; they seem quite

independent, they want to be seen, but the way teachers treated them, many of them didn't see individuality in children. Then the children felt hurt, and started to behave in an unhealthy/abnormal way. (Interview, B21)

Disillusion with the education reforms

Many parents mentioned that the state had made efforts to improve the quality of education, as reflected in a number of educational reforms, such as the *suzhi* education movement and burden reduction (*jianfu*), as I have discussed in Section 2.3, but the effects were not desirable. This was illustrated by Mr Tao, a schoolteacher:

Many people wanted a new type of education, everyone can see that the mainstream education has many problems. A number of experimental schools carried out the [educational] reforms, but overall the results were not very effective... Education is still led by exams, and the core hasn't changed. (Interview, B7)

Miss Qi, another teacher, echoed Mr Tao's point, indicating the failures of the education reforms.

Although [the government] constantly talked about alleviating the burden on students (*jianfu*), [there is] not any palpable effect. They came up with various schemes, which were never effective. (Interview, B9)

Many parents could no longer bear the struggles or suffering that some of the children were going through, so they removed their children from the state system. A number of parents had witnessed the particular negative effects state education appeared to be having on their children. These negative effects were described as seeing 'the light in their child's eyes going out' (Interview, B21). Other parents described their children as suffering from anxiety and behavioural issues (Interview, A11, A21). These parents hoped to 'spare their children the high pressure and long hours of homework at their age' (Interview, A13).

7.1.2 Parents' and teachers' own experience of state education

Through data analysis, I found a strong link between the parents' own educational experience and their desire for their children's education. The critical remarks directed at the state education system often firstly emerged from the parents' reflections upon their own educational experience when they were at school. Many parents (such as A7, A10 and B21) revealed the negative aspects of their own educational experience: some had suffered as a result of the need to conform (B22); some complained about being required to learn intensely academic knowledge which had no practical application (B7); some had struggled because of a lack of interesting or inspiring education (B23); some had become unhappy and depressed (A13); and some did not know who they were and became conformists and 'people-pleasers' (B21). These points were all echoed in the parents' and teachers' perceptions of the state education system, which I have presented in the previous section (Section 7.1.1).

As a result, the parents looked for educational alternatives for their children, so their children could walk a different path. For example, two excerpts from the accounts of Mrs. Zheng and Mrs. Xi whom I interviewed on separate occasions may illustrate this link.

EXCERPT 1: There are parents sending their kids to Steiner schools because they didn't have a happy childhood themselves... I was like that! I saw the children in [mainstream] kindergartens and schools and instinctively I felt they were not happy! ... Then I thought I just want my child to be happier. That's why I brought my child here. (Interview, A10)

EXCERPT 2: I was an obedient child, I was observant of the rules. When I saw my son was also obedient and conformist... and often became stressed due to some teacher's comments. I wanted a change. (Interview, B21)

As can be seen, mention of unhappiness and stress was prevalent in parents' accounts of their experience of the state education. The dissatisfaction with state education also led some state school teachers to become Steiner teachers. Mr Wang, a teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, disclosed his experience:

I am a victim in this [mainstream] education system. I came to this school with my burdened past. I am hoping my students will not become victims. I had no choice, whilst they have

many more choices today. (Interview, A8)

For some parents, in extreme cases, this dissatisfaction with their own schooling experience and the love for their children were even the driving forces that prompted them to become pioneers to set up Steiner schools. As a Steiner school principal, Mr Ma, passionately explained:

We ordinary people in society are pretty much fatalistic, and common (*pingyong*), we don't really want to risk anything or break through, we just suck it up. However, if it is for our children, we could do ANYTHING! How did the early pioneers [as school founders] come here? It's because 'I don't want my child to suffer from the education that I went through previously'... This is why the Steiner schools became a seed of reform; it's come out of the parents' love. (Interview, Z1)

To summarise Section 7.1, many parents and teachers at the two Steiner schools were concerned that the state system was utilitarian and examination-oriented, with students being overloaded with homework and the teaching being for instrumental purposes, such as academic results and class rankings. The children suffered from pressure as a result. In many of the cases these concerns emanated out of the negative experience parents and teachers had had under the Chinese state school system.

7.2 The *Pull* Factor: Confidence in the Ability of Steiner Education to Develop a Happy, Holistic Child

What *pulled* parents to send their children to Steiner schools was that the parents perceived Steiner education would help them in raising a healthy, happy, holistic child with social awareness. The general values visible across these data demonstrate that many parents in these families shared similar values, which were rooted in their constructions of what they wanted for their children and whom they wanted their children to 'become'. The desire to cultivate healthy, happy, holistic human beings who possess critical thinking, an ethical sense of self and free to become themselves, was prevalent in the various accounts of parents. For many parents, Steiner education would help them to achieve these educational desires.

7.2.1 Supporting a free, healthy and happy childhood

When asked to think about what had led them to Steiner education, a number of parents (such as A10, B6, B12, B15, B22) revealed that Steiner education promoted freedom, health and happiness in the child's development, which they truly valued. Mrs. Yu, who later became a Steiner teacher, recalled her visits to a state kindergarten and Steiner kindergartens, and commented that the difference was in the freedom and space for the children:

We visited some other kindergartens, children had to behave, with a lot of rules. They had to sit there and do something. I felt the children here could be freer, and they might have more space to play, so we thought this environment would be good for them. (Interview, B12)

Mrs. Yun, a teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school disclosed that many parents came to the school because they wanted the child to be psychologically and mentally healthy (Interview, B17). Two Steiner mothers, Mrs. Dou and Mrs. Wei, expressed their desire regarding the health element of this education:

EXCERPT 1: Regarding learning, we don't really have expectations of what you will achieve, but our requirement is that [the child] has to be physically and mentally healthy. (Interview, B6)

EXCERPT 2: This education can support the healthy development of a child... The health of the children is ensured, physical health, I can see they are very healthy, not a single one wearing glasses, not a single one overweight, full of life every day. It supports their emotional development as well. I can see that from my own children. (Interview, B15)

Proximity to, and connection with, nature is another reason that parents and teachers preferred Steiner education. One mother, Mrs Yang, commented, 'This school is far from the city, being with nature, I feel very grounded and comfortable here' (Interview, A16). One Steiner teacher, Mr Wang, also commented that the connection to nature through woodwork lessons was what he really appreciated about Steiner education.

The woodwork lesson here is so wonderful! If they are able to do woodwork, and to connect with this natural material [the wood], and combine with their own creativity and will... I

think it's like coming back to the original state of a human being! (Interview, A8)

Happiness was also a shared theme among the accounts of these parents when talking about why they chose Steiner education. Excerpts from accounts of two interviews with Mrs. Fan and Mr Wei, one Steiner father and one Steiner mother, at the Chengdu Steiner school, may demonstrate this point.

EXCERPT 1: Perhaps one day these children may stand at the top of society, as doctors, scientists, in the upper levels of society, I am sure they can achieve that, but no one would ever ask, 'Dear child, are you well, are you happy?' (Interview, B22)

EXCERPT 2: My daughter became so happy after moving here [to the Steiner school]. She never climbed trees before, but here right away she climbed up a tree. She was so happy! And every day she became happier, cannot be happier... She likes it that the whole atmosphere here is quite relaxed. It's not like in the state schools: they are not allowed to climb trees... they have to stay in the classroom during break, cannot even run around... too many restrictions. (Interview, B6)

Mrs. Yu, a teacher, shared some of the general concerns of parents regarding the lack of a proper childhood in the mainstream kindergartens, which had become one of the reasons that parents looked for educational alternatives. She found the Steiner kindergarten, on the other hand, offered her child a happy and healthy childhood without too much pressure to acquire factual knowledge, and thus she sent her child to a Steiner kindergarten.

In many kindergartens around China, they teach small children a lot of things. Actually parents are quite worried about it: they feel they are too young, it's too hard on them to learn so much. The parents just want the children to have a happy childhood. It's quite a widespread voice among Chinese parents, that they just want their children to be happy, to be physically and mentally healthy. (Interview, B12)

This point echoes what I discussed in Section 7.1, that parents found the state education 'too much, too soon'. For example, Mrs. Zheng explained why all these parents were attracted by Steiner education and sent their children to a Steiner school,

Perhaps at the beginning they were just attracted by a number of simple things: this school does not have rigid examinations, no appraisals, no rankings, no evaluations, no favouring one child whilst disfavouring another, no physical punishments, simple as that. (Interview, A7)

7.2.2 Raising a holistic, balanced, socially aware child

Many parents stated that developing a holistic, balanced, socially aware child was one of the reasons they came to Steiner education. Mrs. Bo, who is one teacher parent of the Chengdu Steiner school, made a point after many years of observation at the school: '[The parents] would like their child to become a more holistic individual, so they chose to stay in the Steiner school' (Interview, B13). Mrs. Yu, a Steiner teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, also commented that the practice of holism was what drew her to becoming a Steiner teacher.

We want all children to become well rounded... At least at the stage of lower school... we don't prepare them for examinations so as to adapt to the examination system in this country. (Interview, B12)

As a result of the holistic practice of education in Steiner schools, Mrs. Xi, who was both a Steiner mother and a Steiner teacher, commented on how children are different in Steiner schools compared to those in state schools.

What Steiner education really brings to children, in fact if you compare them... these children are completely different. For example, if you teach them something here, the child would ask you why and how so? While in a mainstream he would also ask, but most of time he doesn't have that spark in him, he is too used to memorising the knowledge...

There are some children who came from the mainstream schools, it's very easy to stuff them with knowledge. But they don't do so much thinking any more... But the longer the child has been here, he becomes more curious, and also he masters things in a more flexible way, he becomes more well-rounded...(Interview, B21)

Furthermore, some parents liked the aspect of Steiner education that develops a child beyond the physical realm and includes spiritual aspects. For example, Mr Chen, a father, decided to

send his daughter to a Steiner kindergarten because of the holistic and balanced development at levels: 'physical, soul and spiritual'. He revealed how he discovered Steiner education and why he was attracted to it,

As I was gradually researching [Steiner education], I discovered that it is a holistic education that emphasises the balanced development at the physical, soul and spiritual levels. This was very attractive to me, and I felt this was exactly what I was looking for. (Interview, A10)

The model of head, heart and hands

Many parents and teachers (such as A8, A10, B11, B24) particularly liked the model of 'thinking (head), feeling (heart) and willing (hands)' as a central concept in Steiner education (as elaborated in Section 3.3.3). Some parents commented that obtaining and accumulating factual knowledge was not sufficient, and they rather liked the holistic development in 'thinking, feeling and willing' promoted in Steiner education. As was expressed by Mrs. Lang, a Steiner mother, 'knowledge at this stage is important, but not as a priority' (Interview, B24). Another mother, Mrs. Zou, who sent her daughter to the Steiner kindergarten and later on quitted her job to become a Steiner kindergarten teacher, commented on her journey seeing the development of the inner strength and 'will' in her daughter.

One thing I am satisfied with is that I can see her inner strength growing. It's said in Steiner education that from 0 to 7 is about the will. The exercise of the will is very important. There are many stages in her play, it's all a manifestation of the will. When she reached a certain age, she was able to make a plan, and then to call her friends to help her to realise the plan. When you see that, you feel quite amazed. (Interview, B11)

Becoming a social being with social awareness

To some parents (such as A7, A2, B4, B22, B24), developing a holistic child also meant that they would become a social being and develop appropriate manners in complex interpersonal interactions. As described by Mrs. Fan, a mother at the Chengdu Steiner school: 'Education isn't just about knowledge, but also about becoming a human being (*zuoren*), becoming a social being in society' (Interview, B22). This is echoed by Mrs. Zheng, another mother,

What do you want in the end [regarding education]? Isn't it the qualities she has developed as a human being? The depth of her as a human being? Isn't that she can become, develop into a real social being? She cannot stay forever in the ivory tower. (Interview, A7)

By becoming a social being and connected to the world, a child is becoming holistic. For example, Mr Qian, who was both a Steiner parent and a Steiner teacher, reflected:

This education cares about social development, within social groups, emotional bonding, and teachers' personal development, the connections between families and school, interactions between communities. So I see this education is in fact the art of living... It is alive, it is holistic... It helps a child to be strong and connected, and then he can be connected to heaven and earth (*tongtian dadi*). (Interview, A2)

Furthermore, parents wanted this social being to be responsible, benevolent and altruistic, and to contribute to society and the world. For some parents, Steiner education was a strategy to develop these social values in children. Excerpts from accounts of two interviews with Mrs Lang from the Chengdu Steiner school and Mrs. Zheng from the Beijing Steiner school may demonstrate this point.

EXCERPT 1: Personally, I really just hope they can be healthy, free, and find out who they are... And then through this 'self' to connect with the world, to solve the problems that they wish to tackle. (Interview, B24)

EXCERPT 2: I was very shocked when I heard the children's response regarding our school renovation project. They asked, 'Can we consider using more environmental friendly construction material?... How can we reduce the construction waste?' ... I then thought, what is most significant about this education? It's that it really educates the child to be responsible and valuable to society, but not a parasite, not a machine that only knows how to pass examinations. (Interview, A7)

In another case, after Mrs. Hua saw these seeds of the values flourishing in children, she then founded a Steiner school.

I saw students gradually growing up, starting to demonstrate their own thinking and views, and caring about society, and the world, and being very capable with their hands. At that moment, I knew this is the education that I want to pursue. (Interview, B4)

7.2.3 Child development and children becoming who they are

Understanding of child development

Many parents and teachers explained that they were attracted to Steiner education due to the emphasis it places on the different phases of child development (see Section 3.3.3 for details of child development in Steiner education). For example, Mrs. Zhou was both a Steiner parent and a teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, who had previously obtained her PhD in education at a renowned university in China, and she passionately explained that one of the reasons she was attracted to and chose Steiner education was to do with how she came to understand child development in Steiner education:

Mrs Hua's workshop showed me so vividly that the basis of this education is that that it has studied human beings very thoroughly. ...even after studying education for so many years [in academia], I didn't know about the inner changes in children during their development - what would happen to him precisely, at what age, why this would happen... I realised [Steiner education] offers so much clarity in this... I am very grateful. (Interview, A5)

Mr Qian, the above-mentioned Steiner parent and Steiner teacher, revealed to me why he was so passionate about Steiner education:

This education has a very good intention, which is to study the developmental stages of children, and which aspects of development we need to take care of at a certain stage... This education has thoroughly thought through all the developmental stages. And then, at each stage, it also takes 'feeling, willing and thinking', all three, into account. (Interview, A2)

My observations and discussions with teachers in the field foregrounded the importance of understanding child development. For example, an experienced class teacher, Mrs. Yu, who started to teach at the school when it was first founded, shared with me how the teachers used their knowledge of child development in their teaching.

Every annual meeting [of teachers] we will study his [Steiner's] changing consciousness of children in Steiner education, which is also the psychological development of children in each class (year)... Basically at the start of the term, all teachers from each class (year) will sit together to study and research the different states of each age [of children]... Then each of us [teachers] will go to prepare the [teaching] content so as to respond to each age group. (Interview, B12)

Becoming who they are

Many parents considered Steiner education could help their children 'become who they are'. To some parents, fully becoming oneself meant, 'to flourish naturally like a flower, without too much artificial influence' (Interview, A15); to some, it meant 'finding out the path s/he wants to walk in life, without being told by parents or others' (Interview, B19); to some, it meant 'comfortably being oneself, no matter what profession s/he chooses' (Interview, A24) and 'it is okay the s/she does not become an expert in some areas or influential as long as s/he is happy and content' (Interview, B22); to some others, it meant being able to create one's own life with freedom. For example, Mr Chen shared his understanding about 'becoming oneself':

I like it that the purpose of this education is to develop a free human being, an actor, rather than a reactor. This being is able to create his/her life journey, and becomes more free, and more influential, more able to inspire others and change the world... To be able to create our own life, that is the happiest thing... (Interview, A10)

To summarise this section (Section 7.2), across a wide range of accounts given in the interviews with parents, three emerging reasons and prospects *pulled* parents towards Steiner education, namely: 1) support for freedom, health and happiness in childhood; 2) promotion of wholeness with social awareness; and 3) encouragement for the child to develop and become him/herself. Parents considered that Steiner education encouraged these values, and thus they had chosen Steiner schools to send their children to.

7.3 Interplay of *Push* and *Pull* Factors

Parental entry into Steiner education can be seen as framed by the interplay between *push* and *pull* factors: *push* factors push them away from the state education, whilst several *pull* factors drew these parents towards the prospect of Steiner education.

7.3.1 *Push before pull*

For many parents, the disillusionment generated as result of their child's experiences *pushed* them away from a strong commitment towards the state schools. Seemingly the *push* factors played their role well before any *pull* factors entered into the picture. For example, one mother shared her view as to what had led parents around her to choose Steiner education.

Their child had already started in the state school, or state kindergarten, and [the parents] realised the child was really suffering there, then they thought, 'Can I try some [educational] alternatives?' So they searched and searched, and then they found Steiner education. (Interview, A7)

The spread of Steiner education seemed to reflect the helplessness that parents felt with regards to the state education. However, on the other hand, teachers at the Steiner schools sometimes showed concern about whether this school was just a refuge in the eyes of many parents, allowing them to hide away from the state system. Steiner education may not be the 'choice' but may rather be a result of 'having no choice'. This is illustrated in the views of Mr Miao, who was a school principal who founded a Steiner school after leaving his job as a government official.

Parents felt worried about the state schools, they didn't know much [about Steiner education] and just gave it a try. Another group [of parents] was those whose child had problems in the state schools, which couldn't be solved, and no schools wanted the child, so the child ended up here. (Interview, Z2)

Indeed, this might have emerged as a source of concern for the Steiner schools and the staff. For example, a Steiner school principal tried to examine the motivations of parents who were trying to enter Steiner education.

I often ask parents, 'You came to Steiner schools because you love the theory/philosophy of Steiner education, or because you hate the state education?' These are two largely different motivations, 'Was your choice based on fear, or based on love?' (Interview, Z1)

Many parents had tried other education models, including Montessori or *guoxue* (Chinese classical studies) schools, before coming to a Steiner school. At the same time, a few parents admitted that choosing Steiner education was not their ideal option, but not a bad choice either. In some cases, schooling abroad was becoming a favoured option for a family, but for various reasons, such as limited resources to emigrate or an insecure financial situation. In addition, the weakness of the other available alternative educational models also contributed to parents choosing Steiner education. For example, a senior teacher shared his view on why parents chose Steiner education rather than the New Education schools, *guoxue* education, and Montessori.

The New Education has a pretty poor base in terms of its [educational] theory; the *dujing* education²⁷ lacks a clear underpinning educational theory... Montessori doesn't [usually] have secondary education, and Steiner education provides a more comprehensive system, therefore many people chose to dedicate themselves into Steiner education. (Interview, B7)

For many parents, the path towards Steiner education was not an easy one. In their decision-making process, the prospect of Steiner education outside the system (*tizhiwai*) involved anxious deliberation and feelings of insecurity. This was also linked to the uncertainty of what the school life in a Steiner school might look like, whether it was achievable, and if it would be successful. However, it seemed that the *pull* factors had a heavier weight after the parents opted for Steiner education. As they started the journey with Steiner education, they gradually developed more confidence in this choice. This will be illustrated further in Section 9.1 in Chapter 9 - Life after Entering Steiner Education.

²⁷ *Dujing* education, also called Confucian classical education, has its roots in hundreds of years of Chinese traditional language and cultural education.

7.3.2 A case story of Mrs. Fan

In this section, an example of how Mrs. Fan (Interview, B22), a mother who took the decision to opt for the journey with Steiner education in relation to the *push* and *pull* interplay, is presented. Mrs. Fan revealed details of the journey that took her towards Steiner education during our interview.

Case of Mrs Fan

From early on, Mrs Fan had a fairly negative perception of the state system as a result of both her own and her husband's experience. For her, schooling was boring and stressful rather than happy and useful (*push* factor). She recalled:

I went to a top high school, and a top university... I spent so much of my youth, my most beautiful years, sitting with books every day, no interest, because of too much pressure...

Because of this personal experience, she concluded, 'I don't really want my child in her adolescent years, when her life is flourishing, only to be able sit with books at school. I want her to have more freedom.'

She then drew upon their partner's negative experience of the state education (*push* factor).

He always scored top marks, but he was unhappy throughout his life, because everyone around him and he himself pushed him to be competitive and indefectible. He was depressed, although he was always number one in examinations. He then studied finance, was wealthy in Europe... He hadn't lived his life; always doing what was expected by others.

Again, based on her view of her husband's educational and life experience, she concluded, 'I don't want my daughter to experience life like her father... I wanted to give her more freedom'.

As we can see, Mrs. Fan did not want her daughter to take either her own or her husband's path in the state education system. At the same time, Mrs. Fan's perceptions of her daughter's teacher only intensified her negativity regarding the state system, and as a result, she withdrew her daughter from the school.

I hated the state system. I brought my daughter out of the [state] school when she was in Year 3, because I had a low opinion of her teacher's personal conduct.

Her own experience and that of her husband and her daughter of the state education system all acted as *push* factors that led her to opt out of it. Only after having left the state system, did she hear about Steiner education through a friend.

Later in Beijing my good friend said to me, 'There is a Steiner school in your city Chengdu, which I am really envious about.' I got interested because of her words, so I did a search about Steiner education online. I read a lot - views of people who supported it and those who were against it.

During this process, the *pull* factors started to take effect after she had paid a visit to a Steiner school.

I came to visit the school. When I entered, I saw the campus... It felt very warm. There was a pond... with ducks swimming in between lotus leaves. At that moment, my heart melted. I wanted my child to grow up in that kind of environment... I liked that feeling. My child will love it too.

When Mrs. Fan described her choice, she used words such as 'felt' and 'heart'. I will further discuss this point with regards to choices made beyond intellects in the next Chapter (Section 8.1) where I claim that the path towards Steiner education was not just taken because of intellectual considerations.

Besides her direct feelings about the school, she was drawn to the teacher, which was another *pull* factor. 'When my daughter first met the class teacher, they had a long and affectionate hug. She saw the teacher almost like a mother. When I saw this, I felt we were in the right place.'

In addition, as she and her daughter gradually walked along the path of Steiner education, the *pull* factors became even stronger. 'I felt this education wasn't just for my elder daughter herself, but rather it's for our whole family. I benefitted a lot through this process.'

To summarise, based on the case of Mrs. Fan, it could be inferred that the interplay between *push* and *pull* factors underpinned both her decision to choose Steiner education and her intention to continue along this path. We can also see that *push* factors often played their role before *pull* factors started to have their impact on the parents' move towards Steiner education.

7.3.3 Dialectics of *push* and *pull*

We can think about the *push* and *pull* dialectically, that is to say, as interrelated. The negativity of the *push* factor must contain by definition a positive element, a *pull* factor on the basis of which the *push* can be negatively determined. Certain parents may feel their primary motivation for choosing Steiner education is that they have been *pushed* away from mainstream education by its negative aspects. In the words of the teacher whom I quoted, these parents may appear to be acting out of fear rather than love. However, if we view the relationship dialectically, in order to be *pushed* away from something, one must have a conscious or unconscious ideal which one feels is not being met. If this ideal remains unarticulated and unconscious, then the motivation will remain conceptually tied to the negative feeling he/she has in relation to the elements they feel pushed away from. An ideal notion must be present otherwise there will be no sense of dissatisfaction. So within any motivation for change, there must inherently be two opposing ideas, which allow each to be expressible. For example, in order for words written in black ink to be visible, a contrasted background is required. Black ink against black background will remain entirely meaningless.

The same dialectical relationship takes place with *push* and *pull* factors. In my data collection, we may consider there to be present unarticulated *pull* factors present in the choices of parents who only discussed *push* factors. For example, if a parent suggests they chose Steiner education primarily to avoid the competitive nature of the state education, within this decision lies implicitly an unarticulated notion that a less competitive education model would be preferable. Importantly, such a view does not necessarily tell us anything about their position in relation to Steiner education per se. However as a researcher, who is familiar with the pedagogical principles of Steiner education, I can relate their motivations, i.e. the notion that the state education is too competitive, to the idea that a less competitive model would be preferable and come to the conclusion that on this one factor alone they have potentially

made a good choice in landing upon Steiner education. The parents who mentioned a *pull* factor towards Steiner education must also have been partially reacting to a *push* factor, that is to say, negativity from which they wanted to move away. The seeds of parents' need to seek alternative education may be articulated as negative *push* factors or positive *pull* factors; these two elements are required in order that they provide determination for each other.

What a dialectical understanding provides is a notion that there are no single causal factors relating to phenomena, rather that things are conceived of as interconnected and hang together in a non-casual arrangement defined by a process of constant change. Even people's seemingly crystal clear reasoning will contain a hidden dialectical dimension relating to the negative aspect of what they are positing. What my data reveal is the determining factors that parents might have found to be most important to them or the factors of which they remained most conscious. Some people might have naturally preferred to focus on the positive reasons, and others on negative reasons.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have presented a variety of reasons for choosing Steiner education. For the parents and teachers in this study, there was no single factor governing their choice of Steiner education, but rather a complex set of reasons which simultaneously underpinned their decisions, which can be categorised as *push* factors and *pull* factors. In analysing the *push* factors, parents made critical comments based on the instrumentalist and examination-oriented characteristics of the state school system. The disappointment and disillusionment which resulted from their child's experiences and their own schooling experiences pushed them away from a strong commitment to the state system. On the other hand, among the *pull* factors, happiness, holism and child development (and 'becoming who they are') were central to the parental choice of Steiner education. Following this, I have presented how particular *push* and *pull* factors relate to each other and the interplay between them in parents' decision-making process. I have argued that these factors should not be understood independently but rather dialectically and as being interrelated.

Many parents and teachers rejected the values of mainstream education, expressed in sayings such as, 'don't let your child lose at the starting line' (*bu yao shu zai qi pao xian shang*), a

popular expression used to justify sending 4-year-olds to evening classes. Instead, they placed a lot less emphasis on academia at a young age, preferring to provide their children with the time and space to embrace their childhood. They also expressed their desire for a more balanced and holistic approach to education, which would help their children's potential unfold. What parents overwhelmingly wanted for their children was for them to be recognised as people with multi-dimensional aspects, such that their emotional and spiritual, as well as cognitive needs would be met.

In the following chapter (Chapter 8), building on the two *push* and *pull* categories relating to their choice of Steiner education, I will lay out *how* they chose Steiner education.

Chapter 8 Path towards Steiner Education

My effort in the previous chapter is to capture *why* parents chose Steiner education. I will now give attention to *how* parents reached the point of entering the gateway to Steiner education. This chapter focuses on the decision-making process of the parents and teachers and how the parents achieved the transfer of their children to Steiner education. Together with Chapter 7, this chapter is linked to research question 1, which is: *What is the reasoning and decision-making process for parents and teachers in selecting Steiner education over mainstream education?*

8.1 The Path towards Steiner Education

In summary the path towards Steiner education involves two steps: 1) encountering Steiner education, through friends, educational experts and their own books, which impacts on the intellectual level; and 2) experience and engagement with Steiner education: making connections through school visits, and/or attending workshops organised by Steiner schools. Most parents and teachers had gone through both steps before entering the gateway to Steiner education.

8.1.1 Encountering Steiner education

Often, parents' first encounter with Steiner education was through conversations with friends, other parents or educational experts. For example, Mrs Dou had first heard of Steiner education through her supervisor during her master's programme at university long before she became a mother herself.

I wasn't married; neither did I have a child... However, because she was my supervisor and I respected her very much, and she knew so much about education and children, and was very thoughtful and pure-hearted, I very much trusted her words [in recommending a Steiner kindergarten]... So later when I had my own child, the first thought was to find out where that kindergarten is. (Interview, B15)

Parents' social groups or parents' communities are also a source of information, and many parents discovered Steiner education through those circles. For example, Mr Wang, an art teacher, described his path towards Steiner education:

I came to this village because we had a social gathering. There were some Steiner parents in the gathering, and we somehow moved on to the topic of Steiner education. I found those parents very nice. That was probably the first time I encountered the name of Steiner education. (Interview, A8)

Other than friends and other parents, education experts in China also play a unique role in parents encounters with Steiner education. In China, education experts give educational advice to parents through all kinds of channels, for example, social networks, such as WeChat and Weibo, TV programmes and newspapers etc. Mrs Zheng, a mother, told me her story of discovering Steiner education through a well-known education expert among parents.

I got to know Steiner education through [education expert] Xiao Wu. When her book was published, it rapidly attracted an incredibly large number of fans... A lot of parents like me got to know about Steiner education through Xiao Wu... I read her book during my pregnancy all the way till I gave birth. When my child was born, I took part in Xiao Wu's breast-feeding parenting group, where I met a group of parents. A large number of us later joined [Steiner education]... (Interview, A7)

As we can see, books²⁸ were a source of information that supported parents in their further exploration of Steiner education. Some parents found books related to Steiner education on their own as they were looking for a 'good' education (e.g. A5, B18), others read certain books recommended by friends or mentors (e.g. B6, B7, B16). For example, Mrs Wei, one mother, described how the principal of the school she was working at had recommended a book for her she read:

That was in 2009 in a [international] school that I was teaching at. Our principal liked Steiner education very much, so he would recommend some books on Steiner education to us teachers to read. The first book I read was *'Healing Stories for Challenging Behaviour'* [in Chinese translation]. After reading that book, I thought, does such good education really exist?... I had no

²⁸ Books I have mentioned here are all published or printed in Chinese.

idea there was a Steiner school in Chengdu... I only knew there was such an education in the world. (Interview, B6)

8.1.2 Experience and engagement with Steiner education

Based on these findings, conversations with other parents and mentors as well as books provided the parents with an understanding of Steiner education. These initial interactions with Steiner education often stimulated parents into taking their research further. Perhaps the biggest shift for parents took place after their visits to a Steiner school, meeting and connecting with other Steiner parents, or through participating in the courses and workshops organised by the Steiner schools. For instance, Mr You, a parent and teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, described her path towards Steiner education as follows:

In 2008 after the Sichuan earthquake, I came to the school as a volunteer. That was a team for the project of *Healing the Earth*... I worked there for nine days, and had a moving experience at a Steiner school... After this experience in Chengdu, I felt they (the Steiner teachers) were real people, and faced similar challenges like us [in an international school]. (Interview, A19)

School visits often provide the parents with a sense of engagement on the experiential level. For example, Mrs Zhou, one mother, recalled her experience visiting a Steiner school and why that was important to her.

I heard about Steiner education through the Internet. When I searched, I felt dizzy reading about all this *anthroposophy* stuff, no, it's too complicated... I didn't learn that much from online texts, until I experienced [Steiner education] in real life [through school visits]... Soon I became passionate about Steiner education. (Interview, A5)

Mr Chen's case provides another example. He learnt about Steiner education through the school blog, and after that he did some research into Steiner schools and *anthroposophy*. 'As I gradually researched online... [I found Steiner education] was very attractive to me'. However, that was not sufficient for him to make a decision about whether to send his daughter to Steiner education or not, until he had visited a Steiner school and formed a connection with the founder of that school.

I started to pay some visits to the school, and also to visit the founder of this school, and chatted with him. He was quite inspiring. That was during March 2013. After paying him a visit at his house, I straightaway looked for a house to move into. (Interview, A10)

The use of the word 'straightaway' showed a switch that took place in Mr Chen's decision-making process. Participating in workshops and courses on Steiner education played a central role in many parents' and teacher's experiences when they were trying to make a decision as whether or not to join Steiner education. For instance, Miss Qi, a teacher at the Chengdu school, reported,

I found Steiner education on the Internet when I wanted to learn more about education. By chance there was training on Steiner education in Chengdu, my hometown... and I applied... That led me to become a teacher later on. (Interview, B9)

These workshops and courses provided a platform for people to 'experience' Steiner education rather than allowing them only to understand it on an 'intellectual level'. This helped many parents and teachers as their perceptions shifted, a shift that led them to Steiner education. This point can be illustrated through the following excerpt from Mr Tao, who was already looking for a form of education that was aligned with his educational ideas before he heard about Steiner education through friends.

My child was in a state kindergarten... I always thought children should just play, and cultivate their character. I often asked my friends around whether there were any good kindergartens, what school would be good for children's development... I had a friend, an ex-schoolmate, who went to many courses on body-mind-spirit (*shen xin ling*). From circle of his friends I heard about the Steiner school in Chengdu... So I went to search for the Chengdu Steiner school online... and I thought they were really good. (Interview, B7)

However, Mr Tao did not make the decision to join Steiner education until much later, when he participated in and volunteered at various workshops. He then decided not only was he going to send his daughter to this school, but he also wanted to become a Steiner teacher himself at this school.

Other than discovering Steiner education through school visits, the workshops and courses,

experiencing the Steiner community and the living environment also played a crucial role in parental decision making. For example, as Mrs Zhou, one mother at the Beijing Steiner school, commented,

My child was 2... and I came to a training course led by Mrs Hua, which was probably the first training I attended on Steiner education. I felt great, and the village felt very nice too. At that time I felt the whole village community really attracted me! Later I went back to my husband and said, 'I liked that training, and the village, which isn't far from us. Shall we go?' (Interview, A5)

Indeed, these examples show that a lot of parents made the decision not only through considering information and intellectual 'thinking', which books and conversations with parents and friends could provide, but they also needed to 'feel' and become engaged as a result of their own experience. Participating in a Steiner education workshop, visiting a Steiner school, or meeting the Steiner community offered these parents the opportunity to learn about this education at an experiential level.

8.2 Influence of Family Members on Education Decision

Choosing Steiner education was not an easy journey for many. Most interviewees admitted that they had encountered opposition from family members, either their partners or children's grandparents, some disputes were very fierce. During the fieldwork, I had several conversations with parents who told me they were caught in protracted and bitter quarrel surrounding the educational choice they had made for their children.

In a few severe cases, parents were on a brink of divorce. For instance, Mrs Han openly spoke about her determination to overcome, and struggles with, family opposition to send her daughter to the Steiner school. 'My husband didn't agree about this [decision] though, and we ended up in a divorce' (Interview, A15).

8.2.1 Dealing with family opposition

In most cases, interviewees disclosed that family members objected because of concerns

about the status and qualification of the Steiner school and the availability of academic certificates. For example, as Mrs Xi revealed, 'My husband was not very supportive over this, which is to take a non-conventional path. He felt it's more secure to go to the state system, less worrying' (Interview, B21).

Mr Qian, another father, commented on a similar issue: '[My wife] constantly questioned, "Would the child [in a Steiner schools] be integrated into society? Does the child have qualifications? Any abilities to survive [in society]?"' Later on when Mr Qian wanted to become a Steiner teacher, he was concerned about the low relatively low wage of Steiner teachers, 'She felt the salary as a Steiner teacher was too low - how do we survive? ... With inflation in prices, she started to feel anxious'. As is in Mr Qian's case, in order to become a Steiner teacher, he had to persuade his wife to give up aspects of their 'comfortable' life. 'We were indeed having a stable life in Shenzhen... and we could have security after retirement' (Interview, A2). It took Mr Qian over a year to finally persuade his wife to join a Steiner school as a teacher.

In the case of Mr Tao, he had initially failed to persuade his wife of his desire to become a Steiner teacher and had to change his plans.

They [from the Steiner school] were very interested in having me.... Back then there was a school policy that was that you had to move with your whole family. This is because if one moves alone here, he/she wouldn't stay for long based on their previous experience... Then I went back to discuss this with my wife. She refused to move, 'You can quit your job if you want to, but I won't.' ... So it didn't work out. (Interview, B7)

Mr Tao did eventually manage to persuade his wife to move to the Steiner community after a year or so of trying and he was now working happily at the Steiner school.

Grandparents of the children also played an important role in the choice to opt out of the state system and to choose Steiner education. During my fieldwork, I found that some families lived under the same roof with one or two grandparents who provided support by cooking dinner when schedules got too busy. The parents, whether they lived with the grandparents or not, were facing a shared dilemma. On one hand, parents wanted to take full responsibility for the child (or children) because, according to them, grandparents were from a different

generation and they had completely different child-rearing and educational ideas. On the other hand, filial piety, which originates from the Confucian philosophy in Chinese culture, still plays a big role in modern Chinese family life (Yan, 2010). Being filial in the Chinese context usually means that the person is obligated to listen to the parents' orders, to take care of them, and maintain respect (*mianzi*) for parental authority (e.g., Fong, 2004; Kipnis, 2009). Therefore the parents were also found to be juggling their own interests with their parents' opinions, or even commands. Sometimes the parents ended up quarrelling with the grandparents in order to express their opinions and resist parental coercion.

A case story of Qi

Teacher Qi's case may well illustrate this point. She experienced fierce opposition from her family when she wanted to go for the *eurythmy* teacher training for Steiner schools.

There was strong opposition from my family. No one supported my decision... Thus I had to go through a debate with all my family members in order to go to study eurythmy: all my friends and family were sitting on one side, and me on the other... They kept on trying to persuade me not to go... But I was young and I was determined to go. So before I left, I wrote a long letter of eight or nine pages to my family. I only wrote two letters to my family throughout my whole life. (Interview, B9)

Here, we can see that obedience to parental authority conflicted with the individual's interests and desire to pursue her own course of action. In the face of the strong opposition of her family, Qi insisted on going for the training despite everyone's opposition.

Later my father, who was in charge in our family, perhaps he loves me dearly, although he disapproved of my decision, he finally allowed me to go to study, and provided me with some funding to support me, about 50,000 RMB. (Interview, B9).

Although Qi was determined to take her own chosen path, she still struggled with the notion of 'filial piety' played out in her role in the family. Later on, I continued the conversation with her to explore her parents' expectations of her that she struggled to live up to.

Sun: What do your parents want you to do? What kind of life do they expect you to live?

Qi: They found me a job in a state-owned enterprise in Shenzhen... They hoped I could have a job that is recognised (*kan hao*) by others. I believe parents from ordinary families do the same even today... Now after so many years I could understand their thinking, desires and mindset much better... and their love for me. (Interview, B9)

The expectations that Qi's parents had for her is common in today's China. The generation that Qi's parents belonged to had lived through the Cultural Revolution and periods of deprivation, and they would go to great lengths to secure a stable job and a good life for their children.

According to some parents, the disputes with family members, especially children's grandparents, barely stopped during the entire process of Steiner education. Thus parents had to spend a great deal of time in persuading other family members to understand and accept Steiner education. Mrs Bo, a teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, disclosed that in some extreme cases, some families ended up leaving Steiner education due to the huge pressure from the child's grandparents.

We made it clear before these families enrolled in the school that we have rules here and you have to follow them, but sometimes after arriving here, they couldn't adapt well. For example... sometimes grandparents care for their grandchildren too dearly, and questioned us, 'Why did he/she get dirty again?' Things like these would also cause some families to leave. This didn't happen too often though. (Interview, B13)

8.2.2 Support from family in choosing Steiner education

There were, however, a very small number of cases in which the partners or the grandfathers did support the decision to join the Steiner school community. For example, Miss Jiang was supported by her parents in dedicating herself to becoming a Steiner teacher at the school, and she had a unique reason for this, 'My parents supported me, as the kindergarten I went to when I was young was actually founded by my father' (Interview, B8). Mr Feng, another Steiner teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, was introduced to Steiner education by his wife.

After I got married, my wife mentioned [Steiner education] to me, and she had some friends who were Steiner teachers. That was a coincidence/karma (*ji yuan*). After that she introduced me to some of [the Steiner teacher] friends... my first impression was that it's so beautiful, people sing together. (Interview, A9)

However, in general, these are unusual cases among all the parents and teachers that I interviewed. Some other parents were able to gradually gain their family's trust and support later on. For example, Mrs Xi, a mother who later became a teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, revealed how her husband gradually accepted her low income and came to approve of this education.

Gradually as he saw how much I have been devoted to this career, he felt very touched. And

now he has seen the changes in our child, and he has started to approve. (Interview, B21)

Some of the family members, through the process of getting to know about Steiner education, even completely changed their position and became grateful that Steiner education had been chosen. For example, Mrs Zheng, one mother, revealed her husband's dramatic change over the course of the journey with Steiner education.

Many fathers didn't accept or approve at the beginning, including my husband. He had a lot of doubts back then, but his doubts weren't enough to stop me from choosing Steiner education. At the same time he was also concerned our child was being ruined by the state school... Thus he was forced to choose this [Steiner education]. However, after he had seen the changes in our child here, he was telling his friends how grateful he felt that I insisted on choosing Steiner education. (Interview, A7)

To conclude, while the individual will of the mother or father does play a crucial role in the decision to send their child to a Steiner school, the importance of the opinions and attitudes of family members cannot be ignored, and often they have a significant impact on wider family relations. Another aspect to consider in relation to the issues raised in this section is the potential implications of mothers going against their husbands' wishes, or for families to disobey their parents. Both of these scenarios require a great conviction and commitment from the individuals who are prepared to risk conflict for the sake of their beliefs. Chinese people who have been exposed to different perspectives, such as European 'values', may feel a greater ability to challenge their partners or parents' beliefs.

8.3 The Modern Version of the Story - Mencius's Mother Moves her Home Three Times

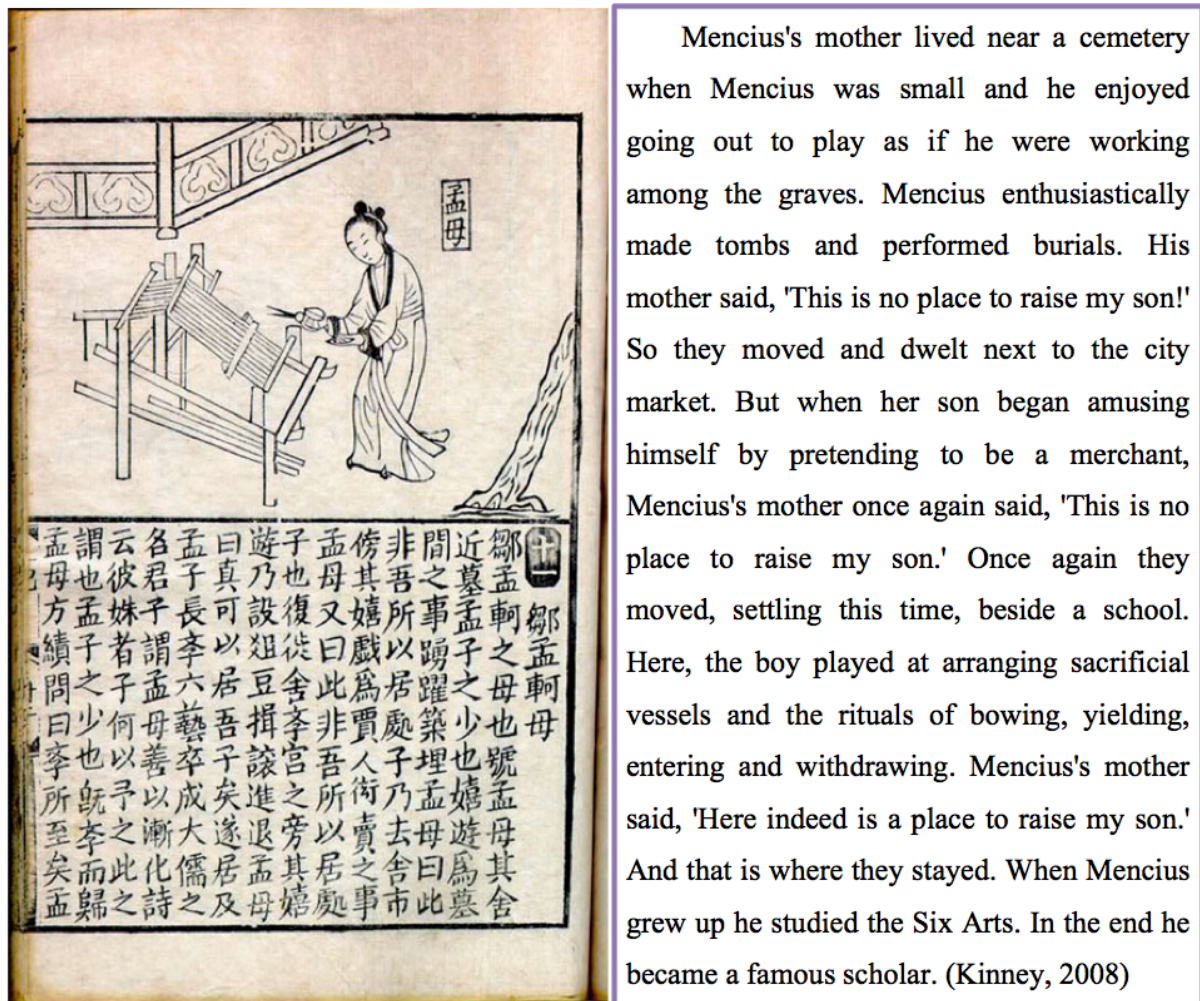


Figure 8.1 Mencius's Mother Moves her Home Three Times (Illustration from Kinney, 2008)

Mencius's mother stands out as one of the most revered mothers in Chinese history. She is celebrated for her efforts at single-handedly raising Mencius to become one of China's most eminent philosophers and thinkers. What this ancient story about Mencius's mother helps to articulate is the level of sacrifice Chinese parents are prepared to make for their children's education. This level of sacrifice may feel familiar and even obvious to the point of being clichéd, however, it offers us a significant insight. The parable of Mencius's mother should not be interpreted as a prototypical 'tiger mother', who wants her child to succeed at seemingly any cost, rather we can interpret from the story the idea of a child's potential and essential nature, which requires special nurturing. That is to say, Mencius's mother did not want Mencius to be successful at just anything, rather there was an implicit set of values

which she felt needed to be met before her son was able to realise his full potential.

The famous Chinese story about Mencius's mother moving three times to better her son's education is devoutly believed in by the people of China, and even modern middle-class Chinese parents often use this story to justify why they would like to expend so much effort on finding a good school and living environment for their child's growth. The risk of interpreting the story without appreciation of Confucian wisdom is that one merely extracts the idea which encourages one to become a 'pushy parent'. Many ancient stories remain relevant to the extent that they articulate archetypes. As is often the case with such stories, the underlying wisdoms may be lost through overuse thus becoming mere platitudes. I would suggest there are two potentially differing lessons from the story: on the one hand, the value of unconditional motherly sacrifice to ensure a child's success and, on the other, the desire that a child may realise his/her unique spiritual essence. It is no surprise that parents in the Steiner schools particularly liked to quote this story, as many of them had had to go through a process of moving their family to a new area where the Steiner school was located, and sometimes they even had to move across from the other side of China, a vast country.

Moving house and potentially changing jobs was not an easy decision to make for many parents, yet they were still determined their child should attend a Steiner school. For example, Mr He revealed the efforts he had made in order to send his child to a Steiner school.

I was living in the city, but I had to quit my job so as to move to the outskirts... For about a year, I was in the school as a volunteer, on and off, to accompany my child, slowly adapting to what's here. (Interview, A21)

Mrs Wei, one mother at the Chengdu Steiner school, had to face a similarly challenging decision, and she eventually moved to Chengdu, which was 2,000 kilometres away from where she used to live.

I quit a job with a pretty good salary, with a pretty good social status in our city... You know in the mainstream Chinese society, you have access to a lot of things with a good social status, but I quit all of those. (Interview, B6)

Mrs Feng, a lady who runs a tuition centre in the neighbourhood of the Steiner school, shared her observations with me,

Many families came from other provinces and they moved to the neighbourhood of the Steiner school. They re-rooted themselves here, making an alien land one's homeland (*ta xiang bian gu xiang*). It wasn't an easy process... they had to give up their career, and a familiar environment. (Interview, Z3)

She further explained that choosing Steiner education was a major decision,

Every parent who moved here is incredible. They are the ones who have in-depth understanding about being human, and had gone through a long process of thought. (Interview, Z3)

Mrs Feng then used the story of Mencius's mother as an exemplary story to justify why these parents would have made such efforts.

Even after successfully moving and joining the Steiner communities, families still faced various challenges and tensions. For instance, the father had to travel a long distance to work every day, so that the mother and daughter could be based in the village without the need to travel far (Interview, A5). There was one father who often went on business trips and was rarely at home (Interview, A7). Another couple ended up living long distance apart, in two different cities on opposite sides of China. As Mrs Wei explained,

My husband couldn't move here, just me. He couldn't find a well-paid job here. If both of us were on low salaries, no way we could live a life. (Interview, B6)

Mrs Wei later on ended up leaving the school with her daughter. She explained, 'My husband is far away. Our family wasn't whole. I was suffering... So I ended up leaving' (interview, B6). These situations were not uncommon across parents in the Steiner communities.

In some extreme scenarios, for various reasons, such as licensing issues, a whole school of parents and staff had to move. For instance, during my fieldwork, I heard that parents from the entire school in Shenzhen had to move to another location in different city, which was a

40-minute drive away, in order to obtain the licence for the school. 'All the parents fund-raised and had two residential buildings constructed, which was a miracle! They could make anything happen' (Interview, B6).

To conclude this chapter, the route towards Steiner education can be summarised as involving two steps: 1) Firstly, parents often found their interest was piqued at an intellectual level through talking to friends or the advice of educational experts; 2) The second important step for most parents was at an experiential level when they made connections through school visits, or attending workshops organised by Steiner schools. Many of the parents and teachers I interviewed had spoken about the experience of Steiner education appealing to them at an emotional level as well as intellectually. During the decision-making process of whether or not to choose Steiner education, parents and teachers often encountered challenges and opposition from their family and friends. Despite such challenges, many families sought the move to Steiner education, some at the cost of moving, changing jobs and even undergoing a divorce.

In the next chapter, I explore some of the experiences parents and teachers faced after joining Steiner Schools. I will also look at some of the contradictions and dilemmas that may have arisen during their experience of Steiner education.

Chapter 9 Parental Experience of Steiner Education

This chapter explores the life of parents and teachers that they have experienced after joining a Steiner school. This also includes some of the contradictions and dilemmas that have arisen in their experience of Steiner education. This chapter is linked to research question 2: *What are parents' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of Steiner education? What contradictions and dilemmas arise and how are these dealt with by parents and teachers?*

9.1 Life after Entering Steiner Education

Participation in the Steiner school communities, and developing a sense of identity and belonging were crucial to the Steiner parents I spoke with. For many, the decision to join a Steiner school required them to align themselves with some unfamiliar ideas and required a lot of support and emotional work. The integration into the community was seen as both supportive and challenging for the majority of parents with whom I talked at their point of entry. Most families experienced warmth and support, for instance, Mrs. Fan described how she, through participating in the group associated with her daughter's class, had gained a sense of belonging and connection.

This community felt very warm. The parents in my daughter's class initiated several groups, and for the group I was in, we gathered every week and did some sharing... This made me feel that I am not alone in the world, any problems could be solved in this community. (Interview, B22).

As we can see, integration into the community was important in terms of ensuring the families' smooth transition from a state system (or another system) to a Steiner school.

9.1.1 Shift in lifestyle

After integrating into the Steiner communities, many had experienced a shift in their lifestyle from one involving fast food to a much slower-paced way of life with more appreciation for cooking and healthy eating, or a redirection of their focus away from earning and spending money towards a more modest contemplative life. Mr Ma, a Steiner school principal, explained:

Our life here isn't about pursuing profits like the elite schools... To lead a Waldorf/Steiner life is about a life of simplicity, away from technology and commercialisation and closer to the earth, and dressing modestly etc. (Interview, Z1)

From my observations during the fieldwork, the anti-commercial sentiment expressed did ring true within the context of the classroom and often in homes too. However, it should be noted certain ideas, such as dressing modestly, are largely subjective, often related to taste, and culturally specific.

I met another mother, Mrs Zheng, in a house with a simple and tidy courtyard. We sat down for a cup of tea, in the style of the traditional Chinese tea ceremony.

Sun: Do your parents support you? Do they agree with Steiner education?

Mrs Zheng: Now? Of course. They live together with me. Eighty percent of the vegetables we eat are from the greenhouse they look after. They grow them, and they also keep chickens, ducks and geese...

Sun: Did you live like this before you joined the Steiner community?

Mrs Zheng: No, only after. My dad always longed for a piece of land to grow vegetables. The 'seed' was always there. Since we moved here... he is enjoying gardening every day. He doesn't even watch much TV any more.

Sun: Do you grow organically?

Mrs Zheng: Organic is a big concept... We don't use any chemical fertilisers or pesticides. We use physical methods to kill the insects, such as using hands. And if the insects are going to eat our vegetables, that's fine too, we eat after they've done their eating.

Sun: How about your son? Any changes in him?

Mrs Zheng: Since we had this lifestyle, there is an obvious change in my child. For example, he refused to eat eggs that were not laid by the chickens we keep.

Sun: Why does he refuse to eat those?

Mrs Zheng: ...The taste is different... the smell is different. In fact children are very spiritual/mystical (*ling*), they just know. You don't need to tell them which one is good, which one isn't... (Interview, A7)

This is an interesting example, particular to the Chinese context, in which three generations of one family have been positively influenced by the decision to send a child to experience Steiner education. Based on my research on Steiner schools in England (Sun, 2015), the broader impact upon family life was less than that which I experienced in China. This might be because it is not unusual for Chinese families, including grandparents, to live in close proximity, sometimes even in the same household. Many Steiner families have kept gardens or a piece of land so they can grow vegetables and have a relationship with the land.

The lifestyle change is not restricted to the ways families dress, eat or live, but can also be an inner shift in relation to how they connect and bond with others, including their children. For example, Mrs. Fan described her change in lifestyle since her family moved to the Steiner community:

My life is slowly changing. I would take more time out from my busy work schedule to spend with my child. ... spending quality time with her... I am able to form a stronger connection with her... forming a bond through working together. (Interview, B22)

9.1.2 Parents and children on an educational path

As presented in the previous chapter, many parents had appeared to sacrifice a lot for their child by changing location and causing disruption to their lives; however, very few, if any, parents spoke of these in a negative light. If they spoke about their ‘sacrifices’, for example, if they had lost their highly paid job as a result of their move, they did so with a sense that there was a greater aim or goal at stake. Of course, this greater aim could be considered the welfare of their children, but many parents also felt that they too had their own important journeys to make. There was a surprising degree of focus on the growth the parents had experienced in their own lives. What many parents seemed to be expressing was the feeling that their own personal development was directly linked to that of their child.

Parents reported having gone through a transformation in themselves as a result of the journey with Steiner education. For example, in the eyes of Mrs Yun, who was both a Steiner parent and a Steiner teacher, Steiner education was not just for her child, but had also impacted her own self-development and self-transformation.

The choice which led me here was entirely for my pursuit of educational ideals. That's it. Of course it was also because of my child. But later, in recent years, I felt that choosing Steiner education means you are on a path of self-development... transforming yourself, and to become a more balanced and healthier being... I feel I am more healthy now than ever. (Interview, B17)

Similarly, Mr Ma, a Steiner school principal, also reported the growth experienced by parents in terms of their skills, knowledge and mindset, as they accompanied their children on this educational path:

When I talked to the parents, they often said, 'I came to the school because I was looking for a good education for my child. After we arrived here, I later found I also came here for myself. I am the one who had truly grown.' Therefore it seems that the child was a trigger, but actually later it's the parents who had benefitted. (Interview, Z1)

He then provided an example to illustrate his point:

At the beginning these parents didn't realise this [education] is nourishing their life... However, two or three years later, parents would queue to get tickets for a talk given by our [Steiner] teachers in a hall of 300 people. When the parents started to taste the sweetness of life, started to find joy, the joy of personal growth, in a life that was conventional and dull, they started to grow together with their children, and their life was starting to shift/change. (Interview, Z1)

A few parents (such as A5 and A10) spoke frankly about the change and growth in them as they progressed along this Steiner education path. For example, one Steiner parent, Mr Chen, reported,

I found that it's not just a simple question about childhood and happiness, it actually relates to the whole society, the whole culture... I moved here, not only to change the education and life of my child, but also to change myself. I became clearer about where I am heading to in my life, which is truly meaningful. (Interview, A10)

Similarly, Mrs Zhou, who was both a Steiner parent and a Steiner teacher, felt that she had in fact been the main beneficiary of her child's Steiner education.

I realised [the benefits of Steiner education] for children was just a by-product. Yeah, it's actually about me getting to know myself... I had this opportunity to understand myself, to understand life, to know that life is whole itself, in fact I was very lucky to reach this point. Therefore I am the one who has gained the most. (Interview, A5)

As discussed in Chapter 8, Section 8.1, a large number of parents came to Steiner schools after being inspired by attending workshops on Steiner education. After coming to Steiner education, many of them continued to sign up and participate in workshops and training. In doing so, these parents showed that they wanted to grow together with their children, and they believed they could positively influence their child's growth through their own growth. For example, Mrs Dou revealed,

For me, signing up for workshops or studying Steiner education was partly to understand my children, partly it was for myself. I think the adult education offered in Steiner schools is excellent... It seems adults can also experience the [learning] process, and constantly enrich,

shift and transform themselves. (Interview, B15)

Mrs Dou told me there were more resources for parents' self-development in the Steiner schools than many other state schools, which rings true in my own observation at the two schools. This of course is to be expected, considering the importance Steiner education places on parental involvement and education, something I have introduced in Section 3.3. Teachers reported to me that some parents had chosen Steiner education for themselves as much as they had for their children. From the outset these parents had realised that their own personal growth was directly linked to their child's development. For example, Mrs Yun, a senior teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, shared her views on this point,

They [chose Steiner education] for themselves. At age 40, perhaps their life path was successful, happy and providing a sense of achievement, but gradually they felt constrained, and wanted to move away from cities, to here, where they can enjoy a life closer to nature, and a more harmonious one with neighbours and the community, with more cultural and spiritual qualities. Thus it's a transformation of their whole life: perceptions and life-style, rather than solely for their children's education. (Interview, B17)

9.1.3 Education as healing

Other than the change in lifestyle and personal growth, another theme that emerged from the interviews and conversations with parents and teachers in terms of their experience after entering the Steiner system was about a form of healing. Several parents openly talked about their healing process through Steiner education and their interaction with anthroposophical ideas. For example, Mrs Shen, both a Steiner parent and a Steiner teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, commented,

When we are 30, or 40... many people are seeking personal development of body, mind and spirit (*shen xin ling*), in fact some healing for what we have experienced in the past in this life journey. (Interview, A24)

Another mother, Mrs Fan, genuinely spoke about the process of healing for her whole family.

I felt this education wasn't just for my elder daughter herself, but rather it's for our whole

family... I think the most valuable thing *anthroposophy* has provided is the healing. It made me feel education is healing, which I believe I cannot have in the state system... I could see the change [by Steiner education] in our whole family, encompassing trivial matters and major issues. (Interview, B22)

In her view, many other mothers were also experiencing a healing process through this education. 'Actually for many mothers whose children were going to this Steiner school, they also study *anthroposophy* along the way. This is also healing for themselves' (Interview, B22). Another mother, Mrs Dou, also shared her observations of the change in other parents who attended these workshops and training at the Chengdu Steiner school. 'I have seen so much change in them, they seemed to be much softer, happier, and easier to communicate with. I felt something in them was healed' (Interview, B15).

The idea of education as a form of healing is consistent with *anthroposophy*. The kernel of the idea lies with the emphasis on the removal of obstacles that may block individuals from becoming 'who they are'. The goal of Steiner education is to produce healthy individuals; this should be understood as holistic, relating to mental, spiritual and physical health, as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.3. It remains ambiguous from the interviews exactly what the parents were referring to in terms of their own and other mothers' experience of healing. However, I can relate from my personal encounters with parents that the healing they referred to often relates to wounds they felt had been inflicted upon them by the state education and to the busy, high-pressure lifestyle they might have had prior to engaging with Steiner education.

In their journey with Steiner education, many parents had also noticed the change in their children in various respects. For example, Mrs. Xi, a mother who suspected autism in her child before coming to a Steiner school and later became a Steiner teacher herself, disclosed,

Our child changed from a boy who never greeted anyone, to a boy that would love to talk to everyone. Now he can have a natural conversation. This change took place within the space of a year. (Interview, B21)

Steiner parents will undoubtedly witness a high level of self-expression in their children; this may be through art, dance or practices such as observation nature. The experiences these

Steiner parents have of witnessing their children express themselves can in some instances serve to recast their own childhood. The Chinese state education in many ways dissuades individual expression, (particular true during the Maoist era), even minor poetic flourishes find little sympathy under strict rote learning conditions. What certain Steiner parents began to experience was a reliving of the repressed aspects of their own childhood. Steiner parents spoke about an ‘awakening’ (Interview, B15) or discovery of their ‘inner child’ (Interview, B23), the emotional development of which had stalled under the repressive conditions of state education and had been ‘kick started’ by their interaction with expressive aspects of Steiner educational practices.

The psychological effects of experiencing their child’s development in healthy ways were particularly strong for those parents who had experienced difficulties in their own education. Parents spoke of their journey into Steiner education as having a healing effect in relation to traumas they had suffered associated with the pressure of endless examinations during their own state educational experience. These sometimes powerful responses by parents may at first appear surprising, but if viewed from a psychological perspective, not unexpected. For parents who learned to suppress their difficult or traumatic experiences, witnessing this aspect of their child’s emotional growth can have a very profound effect (Rogers, 2004)²⁹.

Unquestionably, not all the changes in parents and children were positive. Some indeed had experienced alienation and anxieties in the school community, some had been facing a lot of challenges and dilemmas, and in extreme cases, families even had to leave the Steiner system for various reasons (see Section 9.2 and 9.3). What my data and empirical research reveals in the Chinese context is the degree to which the choice of Steiner education for their children became a catalyst for parents to make changes within their own lives. This is perhaps unsurprising given the gulf of difference between the state education the parents would have experienced for themselves and the type of education they would witness their own children receiving. The ideas and values parents were exposed to through their engagement with the Steiner education system often represented a drastic change to their everyday life.

²⁹ See Rogers: “I believe that a therapy, which results in the individual becoming more fully and more deeply himself [... will] likewise promote the same end – that of facilitating each member of the family in the process of discovering and becoming, himself”(2004, p.328).

Despite the fact that the Chinese Steiner families had already taken a huge step in opting for Steiner education in the first place, it was not necessarily going to be the case that they would so readily and enthusiastically embrace the wider aspects of anthroposophical ideas associated with Steiner education. It should be noted that there were many exceptions to what has been related above: some parents only appeared to partially embrace Steiner values in wider aspects of their lives, and there were some parents who I spoke with who remained unconvinced.

It should be considered that there is an element of privilege associated with self-development and adult education in general, be it formal, or informal, as the case of the Steiner parents I have spoken to. It could be suggested that many parents came to Steiner education after they had already attained a degree of success and achievement within their career, which allowed them in turn to benefit from freedoms that financial comfort provides. It is clear that middle-class parents in general are able to spend more time with the children at meal times and outside of school, often due to the fact that the family could be supported by one income, freeing up the time of the other parent. These families may also employ nannies to help take care of some of the more time-consuming aspects of domestic life, such as housework, again freeing up the time of the parents to enjoy 'quality' time with their children and also focus on their own self-development. The fact that Steiner education remains a privileged form of education and rarely accessible to those described as working-class families does not diminish the apparent benefits the Steiner parents described; however, it does need to be viewed within the context of the light cast by their relative economic freedom.

9.2 Dilemmas about Knowledge Mastery, Homework and After-School Tuition

In an empirical study such as this, which took place over the course of five months in each school community, it would undoubtedly be an over simplification to try to paint too neat a portrait and ignore contradictory comments that the parents might have made. In each of the two fields over the course of my time there, opinions and views from parents did change and even some of the very committed parents expressed doubts and concerns to me. This section offers a closer look at some of the dilemmas that parents felt with regards to the implications of sending their child to a Steiner school.

I heard the term contradiction (*maodun*) and dilemma (*jiujie*) frequently during my fieldwork. Most parents were strongly drawn by the ideals of Steiner education: learning through creative activities, not giving too much homework or too many assessments and examinations to children, and providing a healthy and happy childhood. However, at the same time, these parents were genuinely concerned and questioning: How is my child after their education going to survive in a system characterised by strong bureaucratic structures of monitoring and assessment and credentials, and the competitive social and economic environment they will face in China and abroad?

Therefore several interlinked aspects of parental dilemmas associated with their choice and experience of Steiner education are elaborated in the following two sections: firstly, they were concerned about the level of knowledge their child would attain, and the lack of homework and after-school tuition (section 9.2); secondly, they expressed uncertainty about the opportunities Steiner education could provide for children once they had graduated, including the difficulties of transferring from a Steiner school to another education system prior to graduation (section 9.3).

9.2.1 Dilemmas about knowledge mastery

Parents appeared to genuinely appreciate the Steiner pedagogy, which is filled with a range of creative, artistic and physical activities in the lessons throughout the day, but at the same time, they also wondered: Is my child gaining sufficient knowledge at school? These parents would not align themselves with the kind of 'result-driven, utilitarian mainstream parents' (Interview, B14) who demanded 'concrete plans and measures' that would 'yield quick results' especially in terms of academic achievement. If that were the case, these parents would be happier with their children remaining within the state school system. However, they admitted that they did want 'some kind of results', besides keeping their child healthy, happy and holistic; mastery of knowledge was crucial.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I had an impression that Steiner parents were relaxed about tangible results in their children's education: it appeared to me that many of them wanted to 'escape' the results-driven, competitive mainstream society and thus they moved to this relatively remote area that was very close to nature, which seemed almost like a 'utopia' to many. I was surprised when I heard that the parents wanted 'some kind of results'. Mrs

Feng, who ran her own tuition centre, explained to me.

Everyone cares about results. Because in education, some parents cared about entering a top university, some parents cared about cultivating an independent personality, strength of character, or ability to survive. If you cannot offer that, no matter how well [the educators] speak, parents will get disappointed, right? (Interview, Z3)

Similarly, one teacher expressed views, echoed by many others, that although the parents cared about 'the process of teaching, the quality of teaching', in the end they wanted both, 'a Steiner pedagogy and a utilitarian result, which means their child has mastered a good amount of factual knowledge' (interview, B17). Teachers had clarified that Steiner education did indeed celebrate factual knowledge: 'We as teachers are not against nor do we exclude factual knowledge. Concrete knowledge should be part of Steiner education' (interview, B12).

However, some parents expressed discontent with the amount of what they understood as factual knowledge that their children had obtained from the Steiner schools. For example, Mrs Fan reluctantly commented, 'I have been reflecting on this actually, of course my elder daughter has benefitted so much from this Steiner school, but her knowledge is inadequate' (Interview, B22). For the parents who were expressing concerns, their understanding of what constituted knowledge often appeared quite narrow in terms of how it related to the ability to cognitively obtain facts and information. These concerns emanated from the notion that rote learning was superior to experiential learning when it came to the need to passing examinations. This was particularly true in a subject, such as mathematics, where, for example, memorisation of times tables could yield quick results in examinations.

When Mrs Xi, a Steiner parent and a science teacher from the Chengdu Steiner upper school, reflected on the learning journey of the students, she reported,

At the beginning when we were talking about Steiner pedagogy, it basically meant [the students] played a few games every day. In fact, [the students] practise so little in their mathematics lessons. They lack basic skills. Many of the Chinese characters, they don't remember how to write, and same with their English vocabulary. And they cannot solve simple mathematics problems. (Interview, B21)

'In the upper school,' Mrs Xi continued with her observation, '[some students] just felt they were not learning much so they left. They found these lessons were just too boring.' Here she explained to me that that many children felt they were not being academically challenged enough and therefore became bored and disengaged in classes. According to teachers, the children themselves sometimes expressed the need for a more formal educational format, one more directed to passing examinations. As Mrs Yun, another teacher explained,

As a child is growing up, if s/he is not able to gain enough knowledge or fails to answer questions, s/he would have a sense of inferiority. Although s/he might be mentally healthy, s/he would still feel, 'I don't know this and am I stupid?' (Interview, B12)

There is often a debate around the so-called 'tangible results' among parents and teachers in the Chinese Steiner communities. Some find it too 'wishy-washy', 'vague' or 'fuzzy'; some, however, believe there are results that are not easily measurable in conventional terms, and may only reveal themselves somewhere in future rather than 'right here right now' (Interview, B8); others could even find this topic 'taboo' or too difficult to talk about (Interview, A16), as the external image they may want to present of being very liberal parents may be in conflict with some of their more conventional views. One excerpt from Mrs Jiang, one teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, may illustrate some aspects of this point.

[The parents] wanted to make sure they [their children] can get the knowledge, something that they can take hold of in their hands... In fact, these parents do not understand what Steiner education is really about. They often think [this education] is too wishy-washy, so as to keep the children interested,... Actually we do emphasise [knowledge]. It's just we don't treat it as some results, rather, like a process, a vehicle... it's not about [the students] having to get the [knowledge] point right here right now. (Interview, B8)

What this debate reveals is a deeper question related to what is classed as 'real' knowledge and what may be understood as secondary or useful, but ultimately dispensable, knowledge. These questions presuppose a hierarchy in relation to knowledge, whereby what might be described as 'concrete' knowledge is privileged in favour of a more processual and dynamic understanding of knowledge acquired through lived experience. The Chinese state education system has tended to favour rote-learning, a more direct means-to-an-end form of learning, which provides good results when it comes to the recitation of information, and hence is

conducive for examination preparation. 'Concrete' knowledge can be contrasted with a more 'flexible' type of thinking which Steiner education favours and can be characterised by its experiential emphasis. Arguably, the results gained from flexible thinking are much harder to measure, mainly because it places an emphasis on the process of thinking, which is less concerned with providing direct answers than it is with the exploration of ideas and the very freedoms inherent within thought itself. It should be noted that, at least at a conceptual level, these characterisations of 'concrete' knowledge and 'flexible' thinking need not be considered as 'either/or' methods, rather they can be complementary and implemented in a variety of ways and at different times, depending on the subject or proclivity of the student.

9.2.2 Learning through work and play: What gets to count as knowledge?

This debate about results in terms of tangible knowledge is then reflected in the parental attitude towards pedagogy, exercises, homework and after-school tuition for their children. For example, a class teacher, Mrs Jiang, a teacher, recalled her experience with parents from her class who were making intense efforts to make sure their children grasped the factual knowledge.

Although the parents of our class spoke the same 'Waldorf language'... they had other hidden thoughts. Therefore, in our class, a number of students were actually taught in advance by parents at home, [before they were taught in class]. (Interview, B8)

She then recalled her frustration with parents' lack of trust in the process of Steiner pedagogy, after previously being told by the parents, 'I know that this method of letting the children explore and experiment is very good, but it will take a long time. It's better that you just teach them the [factual knowledge] directly' (Interview, B8).

Although parents agreed with the Steiner pedagogy of learning through exploration and discovery, many found the process too slow and not likely to yield good examination results. For example, Mrs Dou reported,

As [my child] is growing older, he also needs to do some repetitive exercises and work... only then is he able to answer [examination] questions. He needs some abilities, and some sort of pressures, to enter a high school. (Interview, B15)

Homework or home play?

Due to the perception of the value of repetition and practice, the parents were also facing a dilemma regarding the lack of homework. One case in the Chengdu Steiner school may well illustrate this point. One of the guidelines of Steiner education, namely, keeping the students away from homework before year three (age 9/10), was likely to be difficult to implement in a Chinese Steiner school. The Chengdu parents kept on questioning this guideline, expressing their anxiety to the teachers that their children were not learning and practising enough compared to the children in the state schools. Their logic was clear: if the children were not practising enough, how would they be able to pass the college entrance examination and later be integrated into the qualification-centred, examination-oriented, competitive society? Steiner teachers did have sympathy for these parents. As Mrs Yun commented,

After all, [the parents] are human, too. There are many other people in their social circles. Of course they will talk, discuss education, and the [academic] pressure is contagious and will be passed on. No wonder they are concerned and worried. (Interview, B17)

Teachers, too, carried their contradictions (*maodun*) and dilemmas (*jiujie*) regarding the challenging situation. They also felt pressured: they wanted to keep these students up to the required standard in terms of knowledge and practice set by the state schools. For example, Mrs Yun, the same teacher whose child also studied at this Steiner school, disclosed her conflictual situation:

In the past years we never assigned homework to year two [age 9] students.... But now, we have to assign homework to the year two students... actually perhaps too much homework to the year three students... I am also reflecting on this... if we assign them too much homework, they may have too much burden, too much pressure... I know that the Steiner schools in other countries don't even assign homework to year four, year five students, or at least just minimal homework. But in China, the situation is unique. Because parents would think, 'Has my child learnt something?' ... On the other hand, teachers would compare [their class] to the state schools; the children in the state schools have already mastered so much, but we haven't reached their standard. So the teachers become nervous and anxious. (Interview, B17)

This unique situation, as described by Mrs Yun, refers to the common tendency of parents in Chinese society to pack their children's lives with all kinds of learning activities after school and during weekends. This desire to provide their children with an extra competitive edge often drives parents to burdening their children with extreme workloads and long hours, as is referred to in Section 2.4. As I previously discussed in Chapter 7, parents in the Steiner schools criticised the mainstream educational environment for being full of competitiveness and anxiety. These parents worried that if they failed to provide a similar level of homework and tuition to that given to children in the state education, such children would be outcompeted.

The Chengdu Steiner school had specific rules relating to after-school tuition, as was explained by a class teacher:

We made requirements for the families that any extracurricular tuition would not be allowed before the children had reached year three [age 10], including learning musical instruments. Swimming is ok though, but no tuition. We hope the children can have more time to play, less training in skills. (Interview, B12)

However, this requirement proved difficult to implement in reality, with many parents feeling compelled to provide some forms of extra tuition even for children below this age threshold. These parents were often seeking what they considered to be 'complementary learning', in other words, what they felt their children could not acquire at a Steiner school.

Another teacher from the Beijing Steiner school, Mrs Zhou, admitted that she felt 'pressure about parents sending children in her class to after-school tuition'. However, at the same time she could understand them, as they 'want both, the Steiner pedagogy and the result of a state education in terms of the examination results' (Interview, A5). My conversation with her reflected her puzzlement, yet with some understanding for the parents.

Mrs Zhou: Children do not have time after school. Some children want to stay and spend some time with me, but they cannot. They have pressure due to all kinds of tuition classes for them [after school].

Sun: Ah? Children from this Steiner school?

Mrs Zhou: [*Sighed*] All sorts of tuition, whatever you can imagine: martial art, English language and mathematics lessons etc... [The parents] felt their children were not learning enough at school, and then... [*Sighed again*] they were worried and anxious. (Interview A5)

With time, a number of teachers had decided to adapt and made changes accordingly in response to parents' feedback and concerns. For example, when one class teacher, Mrs Yun, was taking on a second batch of year one students, she changed her approach in teaching. She assigned students more exercises for practice and more homework, and tried harder when it came to 'paving a good solid foundation for these children in terms of factual knowledge' so that they would not 'face too many restrictions later when they chose to go to other schools or study overseas' (Interview, B12).

Indeed, during my fieldwork, mathematics and English language had been issues that were often discussed among Steiner parents. Mrs Feng, who was a manager of an after-school tuition centre in Chengdu, revealed to me that she had quite a number of students coming from the Steiner schools to receive tuition in English language and mathematics at her centre:

Often when you go abroad you hear that Chinese students are good at mathematics... In general Chinese students have built a good foundation in mathematics, but not students from the Steiner schools. (Interview, Z3)

She also shared her views about English language teaching in Steiner schools: 'the level of English of a year four student at a Steiner school is only equivalent to the level of a year two student in our neighbourhood' (Interview, Z3). The reason, in her opinion, is that 'factual or concrete knowledge are not quite valued in the Steiner schools' (Interview, Z3). Her point, however, seems to contradict the previous quote from Mrs Yu, 'we as teachers are not against nor do we exclude factual knowledge' (Interview, B12).

I would argue that the subtle differentiation of these arguments, of 'not valuing' and 'not excluding', present a significant point of discussion. Firstly, these questions appear to arise out of a presupposed conflict between two differing pedagogical methods, between what I have characterised as 'concrete' and 'flexible' knowledge in the previous section. There appears to be a common misconception that Steiner education completely neglects 'concrete' learning of any kind. Often these issues are subtle and therefore require some

contextualisation in relation to the difference between teaching a child 'what to think', and teaching a child 'how to think'.

A pedagogical method, which teaches a child 'what to think', faces the question of how it should create a hierarchy of what needs to be taught and in a wider sense, what should be even considered as worthy of knowing in the first place. If an education system consists of an examination process the aim of which is to assess the competence of a child's learning, and perhaps the teachers' ability to teach, then it will be likely that what gets considered as knowledge becomes dictated by the content of the examinations of the previous years, which refers back to my discussion of the influence of the *Gaokao* on the state education in Section 2.2.4. Hence 'concrete' knowledge could also be understood as knowledge which is directed towards what is likely to be addressed by the examinations.

A pedagogical method focusing on teaching a child 'how to think', is likely to encourage a more explorative and, asks questions of the very capacity to think in the first place. This type of flexible thinking does not explicitly eschew concrete academic goals, such as good examination results, rather it will place greater emphasis on sowing the seeds of knowledge as a process whereby a child may begin to explore their own ideas of what should be considered knowledge in the first place. Therefore the apparent conflict between the relative merits of concrete knowledge and flexible knowledge can be reframed as means-to-an-end knowledge, focusing on concrete pre-considered goals and the arguably more subtle process of education which is concerned with what constitutes knowledge in the first place. I will further discuss the idea of means-to-an-end directed knowledge in Chapter 11.

9.3 The Future: Uncertainty and Concern about Examinations

The Chengdu Steiner school provides early childhood education, elementary education (in the lower school), and secondary education (in the upper school). This means that, ideally, students could study there from a young age until graduation from upper school, although in practice very few students did so. In fact, at both Steiner schools I researched, a significant proportion of students left the school around Years 6, 7 or 8. As is reported by a senior teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, Mrs Yun, only three students in the class she had taught had carried on to Year 9 in the upper school. Most of the students who had left either

returned to mainstream education or joined an international school (Interview, B17). Why had these parents taken their children out of the Steiner school?

A major reason is that most interviewed parents felt uncertain and anxious about the prospects offered by the Steiner schools. As children grew older, they experienced an increasingly urgent need to think about the next stage of their child's education and the potential risks of continuing with Steiner education. This section moves on to explore what parents and teachers thought about the future of the children in the Steiner schools, which also led on to their attitude towards examinations and test scores.

9.3.1 Uncertainty about children's future

At the two Steiner schools, the rich culture and deep respect for the arts and nature aims to create an environment for raising happy, healthy and holistic children. However, a critical question is: How will Steiner students meet the demands of Chinese university admissions and the economics of the job market? And, if these students choose to study abroad, will these demands no longer apply? This has been an age-old Steiner upper-school question (Nylander, 2014; Wong, Hughes, & Koetsch, 2011).

The topic of the future was always a challenging one to discuss with parents and teachers. They frequently questioned themselves: What can my child do after graduating from Steiner education? I would not usually receive a direct answer when I posed this question to them. Some senior Steiner teachers' answers appeared to be either, 'You do not need to do anything', or 'You could do everything', as the students' 'destiny is unfolding to become who they are' (Interview, B17). Their explanation often pointed toward Steiner education being a lifelong process of gaining wisdom and learning the art of living, rather than solely acquiring worldly skills, at least not the skills one needs to take examinations. In their opinion, Steiner education was a process of 'actualising' students, but you cannot expect quick 'actualised results'. This could be difficult for parents: as we have discussed earlier, parents did expect 'some sorts of results', particularly when it came to their children's future.

The question around the immediate next stage of education was an even more difficult one. Parents of young children seemed more relaxed, whilst parents of older children reported anxiety about the educational prospects for their children. Parents had to think and discuss

carefully with their children about whether to take part in the *Gaokao* or opt to study abroad, and then they could make plans and decisions accordingly. For example, Mrs Fan shared her thoughts about her 8-year-old daughter regarding her future prospects. She explained:

I think I will send her to study in Germany. At the moment I am hoping to earn more income and save some money... maybe music, or art. No matter what major she chooses, I will send her to study abroad. I don't want her to study in China. The universities, music colleges in China, no, I wouldn't let her go there! ... You don't learn much. Most music teachers don't even love what they do, music is just a tool to make money. (Interview, B22)

Often the discussions about their future plans for their children caused the parents anxiety, because they realised that no matter which path they chose, taking the *Gaokao* or studying abroad, they needed to prepare their children for examinations and tests. As Mrs Xi commented, '[The children] will need to take examinations someday, right? They have to face society, but how?' (Interview, B21). There are some other parents who seemed to want the best of both worlds: not only wanting their children to be happy, free and to know themselves, without worrying too much about the competitiveness which might lay ahead, but at the same time still desiring success for their children in the conventional manner.

With regard to the discussions of the children's future, Mrs Hua, one founder of the Chengdu Steiner school, offered her answer in a diplomatic way.

It's pretty complicated. The path of the child really depends on... the choice of his/her family... Some families may have planned to send their child overseas early on. When their child reaches a certain age, regardless of how well this [Steiner] school is doing, the child will leave to study abroad... Whilst other families, due to some financial restrictions stay in this country... Therefore we have to prepare children for the *Gaokao* in this country. Steiner pedagogy shouldn't contradict taking part in the *Gaokao*. (Interview, B4)

Steiner education is still a relatively recent development in China, this means that most of the parents I talked to could be considered to still be part of the first wave of adopters. Parents often jokingly described their children as 'guinea pigs' (e.g. A5, A7, A12 and B15). There are not many Steiner alumni in China which adds to the sense that parents may feel they are entering into the unknown. In the European context for example, a prospective Steiner parent

could find a former Steiner pupil without too much difficulty to ask their opinions and feelings related to their 'unusual' schooling. This type of due diligence and research, which parents may undertake in order to address their worries and concerns, is much more difficult in the Chinese context. Mothers, Mrs Yun (Interview, B18) and Mrs Xi (Interview, B21) spoke about their emotional turmoil when considering whether or not their children would one day appreciate their efforts. These mothers were worried their children might grow to resent them for choosing Steiner education, especially if they had poor results in the *Gaokao* and had a hard time finding a job.

9.3.2 Why have some families left Steiner education?

This clear picture that the founder provided did not stop families from leaving the school. Parents still had to make difficult choices around Years 6, 7 or 8 about how to best prepare their children for high schools and then college and universities. Classes 6, 7 or 8 often experienced attrition as families decided to send their children back to a state school so they would have a few years in which to prepare for the *Gaokao*. Some families made the switch even earlier.

As I discussed in Section 7.1, parents were dissatisfied with state education, and expressed direct criticism based on ideologies of anti-instrumentalism and anti-examination orientation. These critiques served as an impetus for parents to reject the state schools and then to choose Steiner education. On one hand, initially intending to disassociate themselves from state education, many parents and students were reluctant to go back to the state schools. However, on the other hand, they acknowledged that the state school system implied 'a secure road of education', which would provide students with an assured means of entry to the next stage of education. One point seems clear though: those parents who expected children to go back to state schooling did so *not* because the system itself met their ideology about what a good education constituted, but because it provided students with a secure and steady path into the next stage of their studies. This would prepare the students well for taking examinations, particularly the *Gaokao*, which would then lead to a university diploma. The return to state education seemed a 'forced choice' when they were confronted with the uncertainties and unknowns of what might happen in this Steiner education system in China.

Not all families who left the Steiner schools went back to the state schools. Some families would arrange to send their eighth- or ninth-grader to Germany, Australia, New Zealand, or America, where there were Steiner schools that were willing to make it possible for Chinese Steiner students to receive upper-school education over there.

Overall, it seems the Steiner kindergarten had a very low transfer rate, as was explained by Mrs Dou, a teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, 'the kindergarten was very stable, very few people left halfway. Eighty percent to 90 percent of children from the kindergarten stayed and carried on to the lower school' (Interview, B15). In the lower school, however, the transfer rate became higher as the children grew up. Mrs Dou empathetically shared how she saw parental perceptions of this,

Perhaps you could let the children be free in the kindergarten. Then in the primary school you started to wonder, 'Maybe you need to learn something. Is this school right?' Then coming to the upper school, [you started to ask], 'Should I find a escape route? Should I find a state school, so I can transfer my child to a state school when she is reaching Year 8?' (Interview, B15)

When some families left a Steiner school, the anxiety and pressure caused often spread across to many other parents in the community, which would then become a challenging situation for the school. One case from last year, reported by Mr Su, a founder and a senior teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, is useful to illustrate this point.

Last year, many parents of children who were in Year 5 or 6, had left. They went to prepare their children for entry to a secondary (state) school. Then there was a lot of pressure, which was contagious, spreading to many other classes. Later on there were a number of Year 11 students who left during the same period. (Interview, B18)

Again, one main reason that these families had left was associated with the children's ability to take examinations. A mother, Mrs Dou, illustrated this as follows:

If the parents wanted their child... to be able to score well in examinations, then possibly in Year 5 or 6, they will remove the child [from this Steiner school]. The rhythm in a Steiner school is very different compared to what was in a state school. When a child is in Year 5, 6,

or 7, if you want the child to take examinations... the child may not demonstrate the result that parents desired and had expectations for. (Interview, B15)

Mrs Zhu, another parent from the Beijing Steiner school, shared a similar view about why some families left.

Two reasons in my opinion. Firstly, the knowledge [students had mastered] is inadequate. Secondly, they are not able to pass examinations based on their current amount of knowledge, and exercises [practised], and ability to answer questions. (Interview, A17)

Other than the ability to take examinations, another reason for leaving a Steiner school, as parents reported, was the low quality of teaching at this Steiner upper school as the school was still in the early years of its development. For example, Mrs Xi, both a Steiner parent and a Steiner teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, commented, 'at the moment the upper school here [in the Steiner school] is not sufficiently able to support the growth of the children. [The upper school] was only started three or four years ago' (Interview, B21). Similarly, Mrs Xu, who later withdrew her son from the Chengdu Steiner school, commented that she 'had no confidence [in this Steiner upper school]. It was pretty chaotic, and there was no practical, clear structure for the curriculum' (Interview, B17).

Experience of children after returning to the state system

As for the families who had returned to the state schools, what were their experiences like? Mrs Xu went on to say '[my son] had to gone for tuition in mathematics, chemistry, and then he was getting better in them... It took him two years, full of ups and downs', and she still concluded 'but it's good for him' (Interview, B17). Mrs Feng, another parent who decided not to choose Steiner school for her child after investigation, made an observation on the experience of a number of families who had returned to the state system:

At the moment these Steiner students find it very challenging to go back to the state schools. [The state schools] value the examinations and test scores a lot... For those who later went to a state school or a private school, they all reported being 'unaccustomed to the climate of a new place' (*shuitu bufu*). (Interview, Z3)

Although returning to a state school was challenging, parents reported their children still did not want to come back to the Steiner school. For example, a father, Mr Tao, disclosed,

[My daughter] went to a private school, with a mainstream pedagogy. She had a really good class teacher, very supportive and made her confident. After spending two years there, she didn't want to come back. (Interview, B7)

When asked about the reasons, Mr Tao explained, 'somehow she had an impression that in the Steiner school students gossiped a lot, were not respectful towards teachers, were too slack and undisciplined, had little motivation to study and only wanted to play' (Interview, B7).

Many of the parents interviewed expressed anxiety about the perils of children being excluded from the job market owing to lack of university diplomas either from China or a foreign country. One point to clarify is that parents' acknowledgement of the value of a university degree did not mean they identified with state education in China; on the contrary, they maintained the instrumental criticism of, it as shown in Section 7.1. As they explained, by attending university, a person would be awarded a recognised higher education degree, which represented a 'stepping stone' (*qiaomen zhuan*) or 'entry permit/passport' (*tongxing zheng*) for both further study and job hunting. When talking about jobs, parents were even more pragmatic. '[The students in the Steiner schools] are probably better with the liberal arts subjects for the *Gaokao*, but often people say studying sciences makes it easier to find a job. So it's a dilemma' (Interview, B21).

9.3.3 Will my child cope with the *Gaokao*?

It is difficult to leave examination results out of the picture when discussing the future prospects of the children, as high test scores have long been the main determinant of academic and socioeconomic success in China. In the Steiner school, however, taking examinations and test scores were not celebrated, at least not in the lower school. Teachers did have reasons for that, as Mrs Yun, a teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, explained, because of the test scores,

The child will have a lot of pressures from outside. Very early on he/she will compare

himself/herself with others, right? The scores will be affecting him/her, so the learning will become more about something external [rather than internal]. (Interview, B17)

However, Mrs Yun did see the value of tests and scores and held a contradictory opinion on this matter:

We basically do not set exams here [in the upper school]. However, without exams, evaluations, the children in upper school feel unconcerned, and there is no way to examine the progress in their learning, right? (Interview, B17)

Steiner teachers often believed Steiner education would not be an obstacle but a facilitator of academic studies and achievement of good test scores. It was just that one needed to be patient because the children's 'potential for examination taking has not been realised (*jifa*) yet'. Mrs Dou had a faith that was shared by many other parents, 'I believe when they are reaching the age for the upper school, they would have the capability to meet the world, and they are able to take examinations' (Interview, B15).

The students in this scenario, on the other hand, seemed to have suffered the most from not being able to take examinations. Mrs Xi, one teacher who had taught in a state school before joining the Chengdu Steiner school, with a sigh, revealed how helpless these Steiner students in the upper school were in the face of the *Gaokao*,

I felt they had so much drive (*chongjin*), but at the same time they were so helpless. On one hand, all these years of studying [at a Steiner school] led them to be unable to master enough [knowledge] to take part in the *Gaokao*. But they had gained so much in terms of flexible thinking. (Interview, B21)

Mrs Xi later shared more views about how students in the upper school had changed and demanded to be more prepared for examinations, after one instance of the oldest students in their school taking the state high school graduation test.

As [the children] are growing older, they have to face real life, and the challenge and pressure can be huge. Thus since the Year 10 students went for the High School Graduation Test, now the students in Year 9 and even Year 8 have started to think: 'With the current

Steiner pedagogy, are we able to pass the High School Graduation Test later?' So now the children in Year 9, for example, for someone who studies well, he would feel dissatisfied. He would say, 'What you've taught is not enough. You have to teach us more, so that we are able to cope with the *Gaokao*.' (Interview, B21)

Facing this more-than-complicated situation, the school went through periods of reflection and making changes. The task for the school is even more challenging now, according to Mrs Hua, a founder and a teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, 'So this is our task in future: how can we prepare the students well for the *Gaokao* and at the same time operate in accordance with the Waldorf Steiner pedagogy?' (Interview, B4). Comments from Mrs Yun, another senior teacher, echoed this conclusion, and she explained the logic as she saw it:

[You can] apply the Steiner pedagogy, in terms of the development of consciousness and the needs of children at different ages... and then you can decide how to make use of these. We have discovered that in the upper school, you have to combine [the Steiner pedagogy], with what's outside [in terms of what is needed to prepare for the *Gaokao*]. You have to combine them well... (Interview, B17)

She seemed very positive about the future of these children as well as the future of this Steiner school:

Say if you can do it well, then in the final year [of the upper school], or supposedly we could add on one more year, then [the student] should be able to take the *Gaokao*, right? ... In that case, the future of the child shouldn't be a problem, right? You can either go aboard to study, or you can continue on your path in this country. (Interview, B17)

Later Mrs Yun also added that making the options of the next stage of education clear was the key to the issue. 'We need to be clear about the next stage of education, whether to prepare [the students] for studying aboard, or taking part in the *Gaokao*' (Interview, B17).

9.4 Concluding Remarks

To conclude this chapter, after enrolling their children in Steiner schools, many families

faced significant changes to their lifestyles. Parents spent more time actively engaged in playing with their children and cut down on the amount of time their children were left alone in front of screens. Many parents spoke about a shift in their lifestyles and outlooks, developing renewed appreciation for the so-called simple pleasures, such as cooking healthy food together as a family. Particularly evident was the personal transformations many parents had experienced. Often the move to a Steiner school involved a break of some sort with their previous job or place of living, and they reported on a slowing down they had noticed in the pace of their lives and feeling a greater sense of pleasure in living modestly. These parents had initially been inspired to seek out a more holistic approach to the education of their children, what many parents themselves appeared to have experienced after some time was the fruits of that holistic education, the benefits of which had reached into their own hearts and minds.

Most parents were deeply drawn to Steiner education ideals: learning through creative activities, less homework, assessment and examinations, and providing a healthy and happy childhood. However, having chosen Steiner education, many parents carried uncertainty and anxiety about the prospects offered by these Steiner schools, including their concerns about passing the *Gaokao*. On some occasions these anxieties resulted in families withdrawing their children from the Steiner schools and placing them back into mainstream or private education.

Chapter 10 Steiner Education in Relation to Traditional Chinese Values

In this chapter, I investigate parents' and teachers' conceptualisation of Steiner education in relation to traditional Chinese culture, which is linked to Research Question 3 (RQ3): *How do parents and teachers perceive the relationship between Steiner education principles and traditional Chinese values?* Looking at this question will help reveal the particularities in which Steiner education finds itself situated within the Chinese cultural, social and historical context. As discussed in Section 2.1.1, Chinese traditional values relate to the entire cultural, philosophical and theological field of implicit and explicit ways of knowing and being in China prior to the dominant influence of Western culture.

The aim of the study is to understand why a 'Steiner Fever' is happening in China, and this chapter contributes to my overall thesis by showing how the close relationship in terms of philosophy and practice between Steiner education and Eastern/Chinese philosophy makes Steiner education appeal to parents. Drawing primarily upon interviews with parents and teachers, this chapter reveals the complexities in their accounts of how they perceive Steiner education in relation to their views on traditional Chinese philosophies, including Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism which are the three pillars of traditional Chinese philosophy and culture, as presented in Section 2.1.1. What this study revealed was the degree to which Steiner parents and teachers were interested in traditional Chinese values; some were even experts in aspects of traditional cultural practices, such as Chinese medicine, *tai chi* and calligraphy.

10.1 Steiner Education as a Reflection of Traditional Chinese Cultural Values

Many parents and teachers, whom I interviewed, expressed an initial sense of familiarity with their own (Chinese) culture when they encountered Steiner education for first time. They were able to relate to Steiner's ideas, even though Steiner education was first founded in a

foreign country, Germany. This familiarity for a lot of people made the process of getting to know and accept Steiner education much easier and in many cases it struck them as intuitive. For example, Mrs. Jiang, a mother who was deeply interested in traditional Chinese culture commented: 'My own feelings are that in fact, traditional Chinese education, and many aspects of Steiner education and *anthroposophy*, are in two different forms, but internally they are interconnected. I really feel they are connected in their essence' (Interview, A13). Similarly, Mrs Hua, another Steiner mother, who also founded her own Steiner school, commented:

In fact, the Chinese people have always believed that whilst people are doing, heaven (*tian*) is watching. The Chinese people always believe that there is an invisible world. Therefore it is quite easy for many Chinese to accept *anthroposophy* or Steiner education. It's quite easy. (Interview, B4)

A number of people I interviewed felt that Steiner education and *anthroposophy* might have borrowed ideas from Eastern philosophies, or at least have some Eastern cultural connections. For instance, Mr Miao, a school principal who founded a Steiner school after leaving his job as a government official, shared his view:

Steiner attaches great importance to the study of the philosophy of the source (early philosophies), like the ancient Greek philosophies. He places importance on the origins of this world, and also the Chinese [ancient] cultures... The closer to the source, the less separated the philosophies are, in terms of Eastern or Western trajectories... At the philosophical level, Steiner's thoughts are very similar to the ancient Chinese philosophies... The Steiner movement is actually a movement that, although originating in the West, had Eastern cultural connotations. Thus the Chinese people felt very familiar with it. (Interview, Z2)

10.1.1 Parallels between Steiner education and traditional Chinese cultural values

In fact, many parents and staff saw in the Steiner system a reflection of their own culture in relation to key ideas in Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, for example, the importance of living in harmony with the natural world. However, what many felt was reflected in Steiner education could more accurately be described as timeless values rather than specific ideas.

The specificity of ideas clearly contains a historicity and therefore may become more or less useful over time in helping cultivate timeless human values and ways of being. With regard to the concept of living in harmony with the natural world, in order for this notion to move beyond the merely ideational and be realised and experienced requires a spirit and attitude of harmonious living. The apprehension of all the deep cultural and spiritual aspects contained within practices, such as *tai chi*, is what separates a notion of reflection and appreciation from mere cultural appropriation.

The comments of Mr Chen, a Steiner father, who had spent many years studying traditional Chinese philosophies and Taoism in particular, provides an example.

I have slowly and clearly come to see the parallels between *anthroposophy* and Chinese traditional philosophies, especially the traditions within Chinese Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism... I have also realised that Chinese Taoism correspond to something in the West, and has its values. (Interview, A10)

Mr Yan, a Steiner teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, also listed the traditional Chinese books in which he perceived ideas similar to those of *anthroposophy*, 'What I read in *Tao Te Ching*, *I Ching*, Mencius, Zhuangzi, Lao Tse and Confucius, I can find these parallels in *anthroposophy*' (Interview, B3). Similarly, Mr Zhang, another school manager, who had studied traditional Chinese culture in depth, also illustrated this point with a list of traditional Chinese books.

Personally, I very much identify with *anthroposophy*. Before coming in contact with *anthroposophy*, I was very much identified with traditional Chinese culture, including the Four Books and the Five Classics (*si shu wu jing*), *Tao Te Ching* (*dao de jing*), etc.... After coming in contact with *anthroposophy*, there is a saying... 'What is *anthroposophy*? Is it a Western method to study Eastern wisdom?'... In fact, *anthroposophy* has a lot of reflections of our Eastern wisdom... Although they are from different nations, they have the same source. (Interview, B16)

The studying of traditional Chinese culture helped some parents to develop their understanding of *anthroposophy* and Steiner education. For example, Miss Qi, a Steiner teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, revealed,

When I first started reading *anthroposophy*, I found it very obscure and difficult to understand. However, after I went to study the Buddhist teachings and then came back to reading *anthroposophy*, I found it much easier. (Interview, B9)

When asked to elaborate upon which of the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture and Steiner education (or *anthroposophy*) they drew parallels, parents and teachers mentioned aspects such as the holistic structure of body-mind-spirit in the understanding of human beings, living a 'rhythmical' life etc. The following two excerpts from the accounts of Mr He and Mrs Jiang, a former parent and a parent at the Beijing Steiner school, may illustrate this point.

EXCERPT 1: When I first came into contact with the idea of body-mind-spirit in Steiner education, I said to myself, 'Isn't this the same as Chinese *Tao*, the Taoism? *Tian, di, ren* (heaven, earth, human) and *jing-qi-shen* (essence, vitality, spirit).' (Interview, A21)

EXCERPT 2: In our law [in traditional Chinese culture], we have to lead a 'rhythmical' life, such as what to do at this time of the day, at this time of the season etc. ... This is the law of nature. Actually in Steiner education, we also follow a certain rhythm and law. (Interview, A13)

Furthermore, some parents and teachers also discussed the compatibility between Steiner education (or *anthroposophy*) and traditional Chinese philosophies when they are applied to practical aspects of life, such as education, medicine, agriculture and science. In education, for instance, Mr Miao, a school founder, commented on the parallels between the pedagogy of Steiner education and values found in traditional Chinese philosophies:

In [Steiner's] pedagogy, how he attaches importance to the sound and form, including the application in pedagogy of 'from techniques to the Way' (*you yi ru dao*), is very much in line with the practical aspects of Chinese philosophies. (Interview, Z2)

In terms of the goal and purpose of education, some parents and teachers argued that the goal of education is very similar in both traditional Chinese culture and Steiner education. For example, two excerpts from the accounts of Mr Zhang, both a Steiner father and a Steiner school member of staff, and Mr Chang, an ex-teacher, whom I interviewed on separate

occasions at the Chengdu Steiner school, may illustrate this link.

EXCERPT 1: I remember the first three sentences in the 'The Doctrine of the Mean'³⁰ (*zhong yong*): the mandate of heaven is called human nature (*tian ming zhi wei xing*); living in accordance with this nature is called the *Dao* (*shuai xing zhi wei dao*); the cultivation of *Dao* is called education (*xiu dao zhi wei jiao*)... To live according to your nature is called the *Way*. Due to some pollution and influence when we grow up, we are not able to live in accordance with our nature and heart, so we have to cultivate the way, and through education I can follow my nature harmoniously... Don't you think this is the same as what is written in the 'Study of Man' [by Steiner]? This is the goal of education, right? I was very excited when I found this!... Seeing the goal of education, I think they are absolutely talking about the same thing, just with different ways of expressing it. (Interview, B16)

EXCERPT 2: The goal [of Steiner education] is similar to the highest goal of education in [ancient] China... The highest goal of education is to seek the Way (*qiu dao*). The core of Steiner education is the same. (Interview, B27)

According to the parents and teachers, there are parallels between Steiner education (and *anthroposophy*) and other fields in traditional Chinese culture. In medicine, for example, Mr Miao, a Steiner school founder, proposed that:

[Steiner's] understanding of medical practice was greatly influenced by the European herbalists. European herbalists and traditional Chinese medicine doctors share a lot of similar principles. (Interview, Z2)

After that, he referred to the similarities in agricultural methods.

Take biodynamic farming as another example, it is important to know that his [Steiner's] holistic ecological views on the soil, astronomy, geography and ecology are very similar to those in traditional Chinese culture. (Interview, Z2)

He then discussed the similarities in Steiner's views and the traditional Chinese views on science and spirituality:

³⁰ The 'Doctrine of the Mean' (*zhong yong*) is one of the four books of Confucian philosophy.

Regarding science [Steiner] recognised the value of science. However, he pointed out the misunderstanding and dangers of a simplified version of scientific thinking. He put spirituality and science together to find a middle way... The Chinese always want to achieve a middle way, in between the spiritual and the material, and the role of human beings is to maintain the balance. If you are tilted too much towards the spiritual, you will be dissipated; if you are tilted too much towards the material, you will sink. This kind of thought is particularly like the ancient Chinese thought about heaven, earth and the human spirit. (Interview, Z2)

And finally Mr Miao concluded, 'It's not difficult for Chinese people to accept Steiner's thoughts at all' (Interview, Z2).

A few teachers pointed out the advantages of Steiner education compared to that associated with traditional Chinese philosophies, such as the deep consideration for a child's multi-faceted development. For example, Mr Wu, a Steiner teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, commented:

I think that Steiner education is quite consistent with the traditional Chinese ideals... Also, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of children in Chinese culture. It is very clear and there are detailed ideas of how to use Steiner educational concepts to study children. I am quite fascinated by it. (Interview, A6)

Is Steiner education Taoism in Europe?

When it comes to Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, the three pillars of traditional Chinese philosophies and culture, Taoism, in particular, is often mentioned as a mirror of the philosophy of Steiner education. For instance, Mr Miao, a Steiner school founder, mentioned that Steiner placed great emphasis on Taoism in his own philosophy. 'Actually, [Steiner] places much more emphasis on Taoism compared to [the emphasis he put on] the Warring States Period and the Confucian era' (Interview, Z2). Similarly, Mrs Zheng, a mother at the Beijing Steiner school, reported that many Steiner teachers and parents saw Steiner's philosophy as being very much in line with Taoist thinking.

Why does Steiner education spread faster than Montessori [in China]? Actually it's because in the process of studying Steiner education, you gradually realise how much it is like Taoism. There are many aspects that are similar... This is why Steiner education is getting so popular in China, as you find it so much in line with the Chinese roots. That's why when a lot of [Chinese Steiner] teachers went to attend the high school Steiner teacher training in Goetheanum, they asked the person in charge whether Steiner had studied Taoism and read Laozi and Zhuangzi's books? What Steiner perceived was so much in line with what's in Tao Te Ching (*dao de jing*)! For me, that's the reason why Steiner education has been growing so rapidly. (Interview, A7)

At a practical level, when Steiner's philosophy and Chinese traditional philosophies are applied to education, parents still see a lot of parallels. For instance, Mr Li, both a parent and a teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, explained:

Regarding Steiner education, it sees the child, the state of the child, is familiar with the developmental stages of the child, and provides guidance accordingly. For example, you don't always need to lead, sometimes it's OK to just observe the child, and the child will naturally become himself/herself... This is very much in line with our traditional culture, like 'doing nothing that goes against nature' (*wu wei er zhi*) and 'the universe follows the Way' (*dao fa zi ran*) by Laozi, which is very progressive. (Interview, A4)

In some extreme cases, some parents and teachers even claimed Steiner's philosophy is Taoism expressed in a Western context. Excerpts of an interview with Mr Chang, a former teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, may demonstrate this point.

The ideals of Steiner education are consistent with Chinese culture, especially the Taoist culture. In a sense, Steiner education is the Taoism of Europe. I studied Zhuangzi and Laozi [fundamental Taoist thinkers], they did not specifically ground their thoughts in the educational practices. However, [Steiner's] thoughts and wisdom, at the philosophical, foundational or spiritual level, are extremely consistent with those of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Therefore the Chinese people's way of thinking and being is very much in line [with Steiner's philosophies], and they hit it off instantly. (Interview, B27)

Mr Miao, a Steiner school founder, argued that the rapid growth of Steiner education in China was filling the gap created by the lack of Taoist values present in the mainstream education system:

The mainstream education system in China is extremely harmful to children's nature, and is lacking in spirituality... and the rapid growth [of Steiner education] represents what we are deprived of... The Taoist thoughts are not valued and applied in the education system in China. (Interview, Z2)

10.1.2 Steiner education as a vehicle to carry Chinese back to their 'roots'

What is particularly noteworthy is that a number of parents and teachers revealed that through their research into Steiner educational values, they were able to rediscover aspects of their own culture from which they felt they had become alienated. They often described the manner in which their discovery of Steiner's ideas helped inspire a return to their cultural and spiritual 'roots'. For example, Mr You, both a parent and a teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, revealed how Steiner education had helped him return to the Chinese traditional culture from the Western culture in which he had grown up:

I've always been in contact with Western culture. It is because of Steiner education that I came to be in touch with the Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism, Taoism. Steiner education is like a key, which led me to return to my childhood. (Interview, A19)

This is echoed by many others, including Mr Yan, a Steiner teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, who commented:

The more I study *anthroposophy*, the more I realise how valuable our indigenous culture is. The study of *anthroposophy* makes you more and more indigenised, not Westernised. This is the journey I had for over 10 years. (Interview, B3)

For some people, their research into Steiner education or *anthroposophy* was more than a catalyst helping them to return to the traditional Chinese culture; in some cases it helped deepen their already existing connections. For example, Mrs Shi, a former parent at the Beijing Steiner school, reported that studying *anthroposophy* had provided her with a more

in-depth understanding of *guoxue* (Chinese classical studies) and Chinese medicine.

Gradually, as I deepened my understanding [of *anthroposophy*], I realised it connected well with our own [Chinese] culture... We [Steiner parents] also gradually realised that when we study our *guoxue* or traditional Chinese medicine carefully, that in fact, we are hardly able to relate it to our modern life. However, when we combine it with *anthroposophy*, it seems much easier for us to relate this [traditional Chinese knowledge] to our lives. (Interview, A23)

To conclude this section, across accounts of interviews, many parents and teachers in the Steiner schools saw in the Steiner system a reflection of traditional Chinese culture in relation to the ideas of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, Taoism in particular. Furthermore, many of them saw Steiner education and *anthroposophy* as an inspirational pathway, helping them rediscover their own Chinese cultural roots.

10.2 Concerns about Westernisation, Loss of Traditional Values and Spirituality

Many parents and school staff I interviewed were deeply concerned with China's rapid modernisation, which they felt was happening too quickly, without giving thought to what is being lost in the process. Parents felt concerned about the lack of spirituality in the modern Chinese education system and the rapid rise in materialism. Palpable amongst the parents and teachers was a feeling of alienation from their own culture.

10.2.1 Concerns about modernisation, 'Westernisation' and loss of traditional values

As is laid out in Section 2.1.2, the start of China's modernisation process first began with the realisation of their relatively unmodern status stemming from their loss to Great Britain in the Opium War of 1860. This loss can be understood as heralding an era of self-doubt about traditional Chinese culture. Mr Miao, one Steiner school founder I interviewed, made this point:

After the Opium war, the Communist party established a new China. Later China imitated the West and took the path of industrialisation. That was a path of mistakes that they [the

West] had committed in the past, which was against our traditional Chinese culture. (Interview, Z2)

Mr Miao came to the conclusion that Chinese interest in the educational methods of Steiner and *anthroposophy* could be understood as helping to indicate a pathway back to aspects of ancient Chinese values, which had been eroded in China's quest for modernisation. 'What Steiner had chosen or pointed out was exactly the same as what was in the thoughts of ancient Chinese' (Interview, Z2).

One of the terms that recurred in the interview data was 'Westernisation'; parents and teachers often expressed their concerns about the effects of modern Western values permeating their own culture. For example, Mrs Han, both a parent and a teacher at the Beijing Steiner school, commented:

We all grew up in a Westernised education system, our way of thinking is very logical. Basically we are all brainwashed. Although we are Chinese, actually the way we think and solve problems are Western... It's kind of the polarised 'if not this, then that', or kind of opposite, black and white, when we face issues. And actually we don't really understand our own culture. (Interview, A15)

Here we can notice an association of an education method, which teaches in terms of binary absolutes and certainties, as emanating from the Western tradition. 'Westernisation' in a Chinese context has formed part of a broader process of modernisation. Initiated by industrialisation, modernisation in the West refers to a multitude of social and economic phenomena (see Section 2.1). Part of the limitations of the research is the difficulty in understanding the precise meaning of terms used by the parents, for example, 'Westernisation', as it can be broadly be understood to refer to a wide range of phenomena, including technological development, rise in urban living, changing attitudes towards civil rights, increased secularisation, rationalism, consumerism and economic policies, such as neoliberalism. While it was not always clear which aspects of Westernisation parents were referring to, what remained evident was that there was a perceived link between Westernisation and modernisation within China. For example, Mr Miao, a Steiner school founder, argued,

Our public education system in China comes from Europe, which originated in industrialisation originated, and is mass-production-oriented and knowledge-based... It isn't from China. However, because of the prioritising of industrial technology, knowledge and mass production, human beings are moulded into units of technology and knowledge. (Interview, Z2)

It was also clear, that it was not simply a matter of what was being taught but also the manner of delivery and perceived purpose of the education which appeared to be considered as Western. That is to say, education, which appeared to be sculpting children or treating them as consumers or 'units of technology' merely required to digest theory and information was also associated with a Western influence. I will discuss these issues further in relation to modernisation in China in Chapter 11, Section 11.4.

Many parents I talked to felt that elements of traditional Chinese culture had been lost from contemporary society. The effects of the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao were cited by parents as being particularly damaging to certain aspects of traditional Chinese values, as Mr He, a Steiner parent at the Beijing Steiner school, stated:

After the New Cultural Movement in China, we threw away our own things and abandoned our traditions. This includes the things we threw away in our education system, which were considered as trash, evil stuff. In fact, this was wrong: many things were needed... We lost our own traditional culture. (Interview, A21)

Specifically, parents felt that there was a lack of appreciation of aesthetic values. In Chinese art, aesthetic values are closely tied to spirituality and philosophy, for example, Taoist values in particular have been an important influence on how ideas of human beings' integration with nature has been depicted in landscape painting. Parents often felt that the current Chinese education was too heavily biased towards science and subjects based on analytical logic. The prevailing feeling was that this tilt in the education system was a result of Western influence, which neglected fundamental aspects of the Chinese worldview, which foregrounds an aesthetic interaction with the world. This is illustrated in the views of Mr Wang, a teacher at the Beijing Steiner school:

There is a lack of aesthetic education in our education system, and the entire nation is missing aesthetic education, especially in recent decades... In ancient [China], their daily life was art. (Interview, A8)

The sense of loss was felt not only with respect to concrete skills and practices, such as Chinese aesthetics, design, painting, or Chinese medicine, but also the wider social values embodied in, for example, crafts and traditions. Life understood as inseparable from art is a particularly difficult concept to grasp from the perspective of the current episteme, which considers art as autonomously enjoyable and consumable. To say 'life is art', would suggest those enlivening qualities we associate with art being embedded in life. I will expand on this in Chapter 11, Section 11.4.

10.2.2 The loss of spirituality and longing for reconnection to spirituality

In my conversations and interviews with parents and teachers at the two Steiner schools, they appeared comfortable with the spiritual and philosophical aspects of Steiner education and *anthroposophy*. Words such as 'spirituality' (*jingshen*) tend to carry less cultural baggage than they do in the West. This point can be shown in the following dialogue I had in the course of an interview with Mr Cao, a Steiner school founder who is also a Steiner parent at the Chengdu Steiner school.

Sun: When Steiner education is practised here, is it a problem when 'god', 'spirit' or 'heaven' etc, get mentioned in the morning verses?

Mr Cao: No, it's not a problem... These are pictures, symbols; we don't have any problems reciting morning verses.

Sun: So no one questioned the words 'spirit' or 'god'?

Mr Cao: That's right.

Sun: And all the parents are okay as well?

Mr Cao: They have no problem. Spirit and god is like door spirit (*men shen*), god of

fortune (*cai shen*), fire spirit (*huo shen*), kitchen god (*zao shen*), aren't we [in Chinese culture] talking about them throughout the day? Aren't they the same thing? It's far from religion. In religions they have inviolable rules and dogmas, but there aren't any rules and precepts in Steiner education. It's rather an invisible 'Dao' (way). Therefore no one questioned. (Interview, B2)

Similarly, in another interview I had with Mr You, a teacher parent at the Beijing Steiner school, he conveyed a similar point.

Class 8 used to invite a Buddhist monk into their classroom, to chant and conduct some ceremonies and rituals with them. This is because everyone felt they wanted to cultivate spiritual consciousness, rather than religious worship, as teachers are against religious worship. (Interview, A19)

Mr Cao and Mr You, among many other parents and teachers at the two Steiner schools where I conducted my fieldwork, seemed to have an inherent sympathy and tolerance for an epistemological perspective which takes for granted deep theological underpinnings of life's phenomena. This significantly differs from what I found in my MPhil project on parental choice in England: many parents raised their concerns about using the word 'God' or 'spirit' in the morning verses in the classroom. Several Steiner schools in England had to abandon any word such as 'God' or 'spirit' in the verses as well as in the school curriculum (Sun, 2015).

The concepts of 'spirit' and 'spirituality' were often used in an interchangeable manner by the parents and teachers I interviewed. Many of them conveyed a deep desire for a greater emphasis on spirituality or the development of a child's spirit. Phrases such as 'I want my child to become who s/he is', were often used. 'Spirituality' (*jing shen*) was a word used by many of the parents with whom I spoke, and if not a yearning, there was certainly a hunger for a renewed connection with the more spiritual aspects of Chinese culture. Miss Kong, an former Steiner teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, presented the situation:

Actually, I really feel Chinese society became a spiritless desert (*jingshen shamo*), and now it's getting better. Perhaps I shouldn't call it a desert, as it may just require some nutrients. Therefore now there are a lot of courses on self-development, because there is a need not being met. (Interview, B1)

Similarly, Mr Xie, a parent from the Chengdu Steiner school, commented:

With the economic development and urbanisation process in Chinese society, the intangible cultural heritage and spiritual (*jing shen*) aspects are disappearing in our rural areas. (Interview, B10)

Some parents expressed their appreciation of the Steiner school particularly because of the spiritual aspect of the school. For example, Mrs Zhu, a mother from the Beijing Steiner school, revealed:

I like our school. Here are a group of teachers with full hearts and faith... This school represents a spiritual place (*daochang*) for our time. (Interview, A17)

Furthermore, to some extent, many parents and teachers believed that it was the spiritual element of Steiner education that had made it popular in China. An excerpt from an interview I conducted with Miss Qi, a schoolteacher from the Chengdu Steiner school, may illustrate this point.

Why are there so many Steiner schools? ... There are aspects of spiritual development in Steiner education, which should be part of the field of spirit (*jing shen*) and spirituality. In fact, I now also realise why *guoxue* is getting so popular in China, it's also because it's related to spirituality (*jing shen*). (Interview, B9)

Mrs Hua, a teacher-parent from the Chengdu Steiner school, concluded that the Steiner education movement met the needs of Chinese people who were longing for spirituality at this critical time.

[The Steiner movement] appeals to the current stage of development of Chinese society. When people's material foundation has been secured, naturally the pursuit for spirituality grows. Therefore you may see not only that Steiner education is very popular, but that [courses on] personal development, spiritual development and other types of alternative education are also very popular. This is actually a reflection of the current phase of development of the Chinese society. Steiner education emerged at the right time, and met the needs of a group of people. (Interview, B4)

10.3 Healing an Unbalanced Education System and Society: 'Steiner Fever' as 'Medicine'

One of the many effects of the advanced capitalist economic system known as *neo-liberalism* is an emphasis on the status of the individual, often in direct relation to economic power. This process often leads to a sense of alienation, something which many of the parents I spoke with voiced. As Mr Wei, both a parent and a teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, passionately stated,

Today's society is full of inflated individuals and egos. Steiner education is a kind of defence, to block those things. We came here [to the Steiner school] to seek a better life. Human beings cannot live just for the sake of living, you must be thinking about the truth. (Interview, B26)

The absorption into materialism makes anti-positivist arguments superfluous when there is an economy which functions by way of creating desires in its citizens that can be satisfied only through consumption or the achievement of a heightened sense of individual status. As has been stated, many parents felt a deep concern about the degree to which Chinese culture had become obsessed with producing consumers, a process they felt started at school. Mrs Zhu, a mother from the Beijing Steiner school, noted:

The purpose of education is not to prepare labour for the labour market, but to lead human beings to real freedom. In this overly materialised culture and society, we have now started to pay more attention to the understanding of people, and more and more realised the significance of spirituality, spiritual life and cultural life. As a result, [the Steiner movement] slowly is leading to a transformation of our social and cultural life, which is a significant historical event. (Interview, A11)

For many parents and teachers, Steiner education meets the needs of people who are deeply concerned about the various issues that contemporary globalised Chinese society is facing, such as the ecological crisis and materialism. The following two excerpts from the accounts of Mr Wang and Mrs Lu, a Steiner teacher and a former parent at the Beijing Steiner school, illustrate this point.

EXCERPT 1: I feel that people need to return to an education of simplicity, which has a closer relationship with nature. Because in this globalised and materialistic era, after their pursuit of fame and fortune, people have started to have self-reflections, and they want to return to a simple/indigenous education. (Interview, A8)

EXCERPT 2: [Steiner education] caters for the problems of China at the developmental stage today. For example, we have modern 'diseases' of civilisation, and our current society is indeed facing a variety of issues, which perhaps to some extent is repeating the path that was travelled by the West. Therefore when this theory [of Steiner's] arrived, it brought a new mission to many people: you don't need to follow the [conventional] way, but use this way to educate your child... If we don't have these problems any more, we will no longer need this [Steiner] education system. (Interview, A22)

Like Mrs Lu, who suggested Steiner education might be offering a solution to the problems of Chinese society, several parents and teachers also claimed that the Steiner movement in China could be seen as a medicine to help the unbalanced Chinese education and society to be more balanced. For instance, one father said, 'The education system in China is too extreme, so the Steiner education seems to be a kind of medicine' (Interview, B27). The following excerpt from Mr Ma, both a parent and a principal at a Steiner school, also illustrates this point.

Fevers are not a normal state... Somewhere in the future, when we no longer think Steiner education is special, this means our Steiner education movement has achieved its goal. The society will be healthy. It is no longer special, it is simply one of the many types of education, and everyone just chooses what they need. There will be no more suppression, no more harm done to environment or children due to political or economical pressures, no more harm done to human lives due to fake products, driven by money. Instead, we will live a life that is based on morality, protections, freedom and respect. An ideal world. And Steiner education helps in moving us towards an ideal world. (Interview, Z1)

Similarly, Mr Cheng, a Steiner parent at the Beijing Steiner school, argued this point with a Taoist saying.

Why is there a 'Steiner Fever' in China? I can quote a Taoist saying, which is 'returning, is the Way's motion' (*fan zhe, dao zhi dong*). The law of the Way is to return. To put it another

way, a thing turns into its opposite if pushed too far, or things always reverse themselves after reaching an extreme (*wu ji bi fan*). The Steiner education in China gives importance to spirituality (*jingshen*)... A real civil society is gradually forming. [This movement] is not government-driven, but a bottom-up development out of people.

I am quietly observing this ['Steiner Fever'] phenomenon... I think this transformation is what is needed in China... More and more Chinese people who have become emotionally aware, they started to visit [this school] here, imitate and learn from here... Then people will begin to reflect on themselves, meaning that a grounded transformation is taking place. We are hoping that slowly, this over-materialistic society will pay more attention to the development of spiritual and cultural qualities. (Interview, A10)

This father pointed out that Steiner education brings spirituality back into the spiritual crisis that contemporary Chinese society is facing. The element of spirituality is what many Chinese parents and teachers were longing to reconnect to. Similarly, a school founder proposed his own reasoning with regards to why there is a 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon in China:

Generally speaking, there is a deficiency in spirituality (*jingshen*), in this materialistic era in China. Suddenly something from the spiritual (*jingshen*) level, or something that is relatively balanced, has entered into the picture, which meets everyone's needs in terms of cultural fulfilment. That's why there is a Steiner movement right now. (Interview, Z2)

Furthermore, Mr Chang, a former teacher at the Chengdu Steiner school, even proposed that there might be a spiritual awakening in China accompanying this Steiner education movement in China.

Perhaps China is entering an age of spiritual awakening. The age of spiritual awakening isn't just about Steiner education, but also includes the revival of Taoism, the growing popularity of spiritual practices among Chinese adults, right?... Perhaps it's a reaction to the excessive development of industrialised, urbanised and technological culture... For example, now people in China talk about returning to nature, to the pastoral, organic food etc. (Interview, B27)

‘Fever’ as the ‘cure’

After all, according to parents and teachers, the name 'Steiner Fever' already implies in itself that it can have medical effect. For example, as was articulated by Mr Ma, a Steiner parent who is also a Steiner school founder:

According to anthroposophical medicine, fever is a good thing. You can't just bring down a fever in your child randomly. The fever has a purpose, which is that the immune system is expelling harmful stuff, so it's a helpful defensive act, a reaction. The system wants to burn off the stuff that no longer serves the system. Therefore it's good to have a fever.

When a society is in its immature, or unbalanced state, education is suppressed. The ‘Steiner Fever’ is there to help society to become better. It’s a good thing... The emergence of the ‘Steiner Fever’ is helping to treat society; the fever is healing the whole body [of society]. When there is no longer a fever, [the society] then is healthy. (Interview, Z1)

According to Mr Ma, the ‘Steiner Fever’ is part of a healing process that may bring society into a more balanced and healthy state. In both anthroposophical medicine and Chinese medicine, a fever is seen as helpful as it may strengthen a child's immune system; and in Western medical practice, a fever is not an actual illness, but part of an effective immune response to protect a child's body from infection. Fever is a sign that the body is dealing with an infection, most commonly resulting from viruses or bacteria, and can be seen as a healthy sign of a robust immune system (El-Radhi, 2012).

10.4 Concluding Remarks

To conclude this chapter, many parents and teachers in the Steiner schools viewed the current mainstream education system and Chinese society as being unbalanced due to the process of modernisation and loss of traditional values and spirituality. Despite the fact that Steiner education had emerged from Western Europe, it had acted as a catalyst for many Chinese parents and teachers in Steiner education to help them rediscover aspects they felt were missing from their own culture. There was a widespread sense that the presence of Steiner education in China was going to have a significant impact on Chinese society. Often these

beliefs and hopes appeared idealistic and ambitious. There was a genuine sense of excitement and hope related to the Steiner movement in China: that Steiner education could provide something for the Chinese people that had been lost during the Cultural Revolution, a more spiritual and aesthetic appreciation of life. I was struck by the passion with which the parents and teachers spoke; their optimism was infectious and convincing. For the parents and teachers I interviewed there was a deep sense that Steiner represented much more for the Chinese people than simply another education fad or some passing phenomenon with no lasting cultural impact. These findings prove significant in relation to challenging dualistic views that exist between Eastern and Western traditions, and traditional and contemporary values, something I will discuss further in Chapter 11.

Chapter 11 Discussion

The rise of Steiner education in China can be understood as acting as a counterbalance to the mainstream education in China by providing an alternative notion of what the fundamental purposes of education are. “Education is inherently intertwined with ontological and axiological assumptions of what it means to be a human in a given culture.” (Pratt, Louie, Hanson, & Ottmann, 2018, p.6). With this in mind we can consider that there is no such thing as a neutral education system; the manner in which we introduce children to knowledge, how that knowledge is framed, which knowledge is chosen and the question of what gets to count as knowledge are all implicitly tied up with the task of education.

I have arranged my discussion chapter starting with a summary of my findings (Section 11.1). I will then further develop my discussion in a spiral movement, beginning with critical engagement at the micro level with parental choice and experience (Section 11.2), moving on to develop a theoretical proposition, which sees Steiner education as serving as a type of memory for forgotten Chinese values (Section 11.4). Arranging my discussion in this manner allows me to start from a foundational position of taking into account specificities related to parental choice and from this point to develop a further argument about what the implications might be for Chinese society in a broader sense. This allows me to take into account ideas surrounding coloniality in relation to the very presence of Steiner educations in China. I also will consider the ontology of Chinese state education in relation to its institutional framework and how that can be understood to have abandoned the values of traditional Chinese philosophies (in Section 11.5). As I develop my argument, it may be imagined that I am gradually exchanging the microscope for the telescope in order to consider the essences of Steiner education and Chinese state education (Section 11.6).

I will then give thought to the idea of *essence* with respect to the notion of the dialectical unity of *Yin* and *Yang*. Thus I intend to pay attention to the notion that as human beings we are either in a process of moving closer to, or away from, human essence. I have provided a conceptual framework for this notion via the idea of remembering and forgetting. My macro position relates to the original metaphor of the fever in relation to Chinese medicine, laid out

in Chapter 1, which always tries to view phenomena not as a mere causal chain, but as an interconnected set of unfolding relationships. If I view ‘Steiner Fever’ as a river, my aim is not to simply to take a glass of water and study that, rather I intend to study its flow. It is with these ideas in mind I will address my overarching question: *What is at stake in the feverish manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?*

11.1 Summary of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

Table 11.1 provides a summary of the research questions and where in the thesis these questions were examined.

Research Question		Chapter
RQ 1	What is the reasoning and decision-making process for parents and teachers in selecting Steiner education over mainstream education?	7 & 8
RQ 2	What are parents' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of Steiner education? What contradictions and dilemmas arise and how are these dealt with by parents and teachers?	9
RQ 3	How do parents and teachers perceive the relationship between Steiner education principles and traditional Chinese values?	10

Table 11.1 Research Questions according to Chapters

In Chapters 7 and 8 I have presented findings that are linked to research question 1. In Chapter 7 I observed that there was no single reason for parents and teachers to choose Steiner education, but rather there were *push* factors and *pull* factors that simultaneously underpinned their decision. Often *push* factors played their role before *pull* factors started to make an impact on parents’ and teachers’ move towards Steiner education. In analysing the *push* factors, parents and teachers raised critical comments based on instrumentalism to challenge the state school system and its examination-oriented form of education. The disappointment and disillusionment resulting from their child's and their own schooling experiences *pushed* parents and teachers away from a strong commitment towards the state

system. On the other hand, among the *pull* factors, happiness, holism and child development (and 'becoming who they are') were central to their choice of Steiner education.

In Chapter 8 I described the route towards Steiner education for parents and teachers as involving two steps: 1) Firstly, they often found their interest was piqued at an intellectual level through talking to friends or taking the advice of educational experts; 2) The second important step for most of them was at an experiential level when they made connections through school visits, or attending workshops organised by Steiner schools. Many of the parents and teachers I interviewed had spoken about Steiner education appealing to them on an emotional and experiential level as well as an intellectual one. During the decision-making process concerned with whether or not to choose Steiner education, parents and teachers often encountered challenges and opposition from their family and friends. Despite such challenges, many families proceeded with the move to Steiner education, some at the cost of moving, changing jobs and even a divorcing.

In Chapters 9 I presented findings that are linked to research question 2. After enrolling their children in Steiner schools, many families faced significant changes to their lifestyles. The move to a Steiner school involved a break of some sort with their previous job or place of living. Parents and teachers reported they had noticed a slowing down in the pace of their lives and a feeling of a greater sense of pleasure in living modestly. Many of them spent more time actively engaged in playing with their children and they cut down on the amount of time their children were left alone in front of screens. Particularly evident was the personal growth and transformation many parents and teachers experienced in their own lives. What many parents seemed to be expressing was the feeling that their own personal development was directly linked to that of their child. These parents had initially been inspired to seek out a more holistic approach to the education of their children, but ended up receiving 'an education for the whole family'.

Most parents and teachers were strongly drawn to Steiner education ideals: learning through creative activities, less homework, assessment and examinations, and providing a healthy and happy childhood. However, although having chosen Steiner education, many parents and teachers still carried uncertainty and anxiety about the prospects offered by these Steiner schools. One of the concerns was that they thought attending a Steiner school might lower the children's chance of obtaining good test scores in examinations and passing the *Gaokao*.

They were also concerned about how their children were going to meet the demands of the competitive job market. As a result, around year 6 or 7 (age 13 or 14), a proportion of families withdrew their children from the Steiner schools and either sent them back into mainstream schools or transferred them to private schools.

In Chapter 10, I presented findings that are linked to research question 3. The findings revealed complexities in the parents' and teachers' accounts of how they perceived Steiner education in relation to their views on traditional Chinese philosophies. The closeness in terms of philosophy and practice between Steiner education and Chinese philosophies, including Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, the three pillars of traditional Chinese philosophy, resulted in Steiner education appealing to parents and teachers, particularly at a juncture in China's historical development when there was a longing for reconnection with holistic, spiritual development. Many Steiner parents and teachers spoke of Steiner education as a process-based model, reminiscent of Taoism, rather than one that conforms to a rigid set of beliefs. They viewed the current mainstream education system and Chinese society as being out of balance due to the process of modernisation and loss of traditional values and spirituality. In addition, many of them saw the values of Steiner education reflected in aspects of traditional Chinese culture, which, for many, was being eroded. There was a genuine sense of excitement and hope among them related to the Steiner movement in China, namely, that Steiner education could provide something for the Chinese people that had been lost during the Cultural Revolution, a more spiritual and deeply aesthetic appreciation of life.

11.2 Critical Perspective on Micro Level Parental Choice and Experience

11.2.1 Parental choice of school

In the literature focusing on alternative education in China, studies such as the one conducted by Wang (2018) have highlighted parents' choice of a *guoxue* (Chinese classical studies) school because of their dissatisfaction with the state school. Wang's (2018) study emphasises parents' beliefs about the benefits of *guoxue* education for a child's moral development. The findings were similar to my own, that is, they reflected a mixture of *push* and *pull* factors. What my study shares with Wang's (2018) study on *guoxue* and Sheng's (2015) study on Confucian home-schooling in China is that the dissatisfaction with the overt focus on

academic results in the Chinese state schools actually constituted a *push* factor for parents.

A number of empirical studies focusing on mainstream education globally indicate that the major reasons that parents choose a particular school is related to academic, geographical and non-educational factors, including religious affiliation, racial and socioeconomic background and the child's happiness (e.g. Elacqua, Gobierno & Ibanez, 2005; Hastings, Kane, Staiger & Weinstein, 2005; OECD, 1994; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Academic reasons, with a priority placed on successful examination results, are rated as the most important when it comes to parental choice of school across both public and private education (e.g. Denessen, Driessena & Slegers, 2005; Elacqua, Gobierno & Ibanez, 2005; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). See Section 2.5.1 for a more in-depth literature review on parental choice of school.

My findings in the current study have demonstrated that the reasons for parents choosing Steiner education in China differed from those reported in previous studies on parental choice. In contrast, child happiness, holism and child development (in relation to distinct developmental stages) and parents wanting their children to 'become who they are' were all very important aspects of parents' decision-making when choosing Steiner education. In the existing literature, holistic education and child development were seldom reported. In addition, academic performance was not a main consideration when parents were choosing Steiner education, rather many parents were dissatisfied with the intensive academic studies and testing in the mainstream schools, and thus looked for alternatives. A number of parents reiterated their commitment to their children's academic achievement, but felt this could come later on in their schooling. They were keen to not push the children too hard at an early age. The comparison with previous studies is summarised in Table 11.2.

School Choice Reasons	Previous Studies	This Study
Academics	Very important to most parents (e.g. Denessen et al., 2005; Elacqua et al., 2005; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Weiher & Tedin, 2002)	Not very important to most parents; important to some parents, but not in early years.
Geographical location	Very important to most parents (e.g. Bussel, 1998; Collins & Snell, 2000; Hastings et al., 2005; Hunter, 1991; Kleitz et al., 2000; Morgan et al., 1993; Taylor, 2001).	Not very important to most parents; but if the school was too far away, it could be a barrier that would undermine parents' intention
Racial and socioeconomic background	Very important to many parents (e.g. Bagley, 1996; Glazerman, 1997; Henig, 1996; Saporito, 2003; Weiher & Tedin, 2002)	Not important to most parents.
Child's happiness	Important to many parents (e.g. Bussel, 1998; Coldron & Boulton, 1991; Collins & Snell, 2000)	Very important to many parents
Holistic education	Not mentioned	Very important to many parents
Child development	Not mentioned	Very important to many parents

Table 11.2 Summary of Comparison with Previous Empirical Studies on Parental Choice of School

11.2.2 Parental experience and dilemmas

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a widespread belief that all Chinese parents have high educational aspirations for their children (see Leung et al., 2011; Shek, 2007). Liu, McMahon, and Watson (2015) showed that Chinese parents might possess the characteristics of the 'study supremacist' based on their study of parents who were aggressively involved in, and had high expectations of, their child's education. Some Steiner parents in this study fell into the category of 'study supremacist': despite wanting to opt out of the competition of state schools, there was a sense that Steiner education represented a novel 'point of difference', which would end up giving their children a headstart in some other competitive sense.

These contradictory expectations as expressed in the current study are not unique. For example, in Kuan's study (2015), the urban middle-class mothers are caught in the dilemma of balancing the demands of the competitive Chinese education system against their concerns to protect their child's happiness. They had to deal with conflicting concerns about wanting to raise a psychologically healthy child who could also prove to be a successful student competing against difficult odds. Similar dilemmas were found in Wang's (2018) study on the alternative *guoxue* model. In sending their children to a *guoxue* school, parents were especially interested in their children's development being in accordance with Confucian morality but remained anxious about the acquisition of academic qualifications and integration into competitive, mainstream society.

Many parents in the two Steiner schools had tried various alternative educational models before enrolling their children at a Steiner school, for example, *guoxue* education and home-schooling. After joining the Steiner school, some parents continued to look out for other 'better' ways of educating their children. Parents seemed to have been trying their best in relation to their children's education. I often heard parents say, 'At least I won't regret not having tried' (e.g. Interviews, A13 and B15). This finding is also shown in Kuan's (2015) study on child-rearing in China, based on middle-class mothers of children in mainstream education. The mothers in Kuan's study feel that the uncertainty of life in contemporary Chinese society means they have to be very careful in making their parental decisions and they are constantly questioning whether they are doing a good job. Kuan (2015) attributes the worry partly to the notion that it is a parent's responsibility to try everything possible to secure the good life for their child. The amount of choice available to Chinese parents can give rise to a fear of making false steps and can create a feeling of always having made a potentially wrong decision. If something in their child's life does not go according to plan, they may not only suffer the consequences, but they also suffer the self-recriminations of knowing they had the ability to do it differently.

As presented in Sections 9.2 and 9.3, the sense of anxiety for Steiner parents was no different, if anything there was a greater sense of awareness and reflection upon their anxiety. Parents felt uncertainty about the next stage of their child's education, their child's future life, the dilemmas and contradictions in their own expectations: this all led to anxiety. Some parents attended numerous parenting courses, self-development workshops and had consultations with educational and spiritual experts.

The extra choices that parents face in today's society have provided people with many exciting opportunities, such as the ability for Chinese parents to choose what type of education they feel best suits their child. The issue is that with choice comes the burden of responsibility implicit in those choices and this often weighs heavily on parents and especially mothers. The pressure that people feel to develop themselves in a well-rounded manner, to be their best selves, to succeed along multiple dimensions is often harmful and unrealistic. The psychologist Winnicott (1968) termed the phrase the 'good enough mother', a seemingly radical idea in today's society, which states that mothers simply need to be 'good enough'. What Winnicott appears to have foreseen is the detrimental effect of placing oneself under pressure to raise the perfect child.

The holistic development of Steiner education promotes a similar idea to that of Winnicott, namely, that as individuals we should look inwards in order that we may develop a healthy sense of self. The burden of being ordinary or unremarkable is ideally not met with derision or fear, rather with the assured belief that each individual is a unique and beautiful being. Each being is quietly and ordinarily remarkable, recognised as an end-in-itself, a spark of universal essence, expressed in a particularised form. With this in mind, perhaps the best a parent, or indeed a teacher, can hope for is to help facilitate the individual's unique contribution to the greater story being written by the animating force or 'spirit' of life.

11.2.3 Middle-class choice: neo-liberal influence on the 'Steiner Fever' phenomenon

It is important to discuss the relatively exclusive status of Steiner education in China. An obvious argument against any wider societal significance for 'Steiner Fever' in China is the fact that for most working-class parents its cost is prohibitive. The relative cost of Steiner education in China has prompted headlines such as the one found in the *Economist* in relation to Steiner education, which reads "China's yuppies want schools to be more laid-back" (2017).

As indicated in Section 6.1.1, the fees for entering one of the Steiner schools in this study were high: both schools charged around 40,000 RMB (amounting to 4,500 GBP) in tuition fees per year. Clearly, class diversity was not prevalent in the two Steiner schools I researched: most of the parents and children were from affluent middle-class urban families. The majority of interviewed parents had a relatively good educational background, identified

with Steiner education culture, and had social and economic resources to send their children to Steiner schools that charged tuition fees which were much higher than those of a state school. Evidently, becoming a Steiner parent was an achievement, which hinged upon relatively high levels of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

In sending their children to Steiner education, these parents, in a sense, were producing new forms of social differentiation and hierarchy (see Rocca, 2015). Through all of these pursuits, to some extent, these parents (re)produced the social indicators of good/bad manners, high/low *suzhi*, and superior/inferior lifestyles. According to Rocca (2015), middle-class individuals attempt to improve their *suzhi* and to assert their identity in order to distinguish themselves from other social groups. This point is also in line with Sheng's (2018) findings in her study on the rise of Confucian home schooling in China. She found that many middle-class parents who were providing their children with Confucian home schooling (e.g. *Meng Mu Tang*, *Ri Ri Xin Xuetang*) had prioritised their desire to distinguish themselves in terms of social class.

As shown in other studies, parents' education level as well as socioeconomic status is crucial when it comes to their educational aspirations for their children (Kim, 2011; Sosu, 2014; Zhang, Kao, & Hannum, 2007). For instance, Chinese mothers who have undertaken higher education have showed higher educational aspirations for their children compared to Chinese mothers with lower levels of education (Zhang, Kao, & Hannum, 2007). However, the current study shows a higher level of complexity compared to previous studies. As discussed in Chapter 7, many parents with relatively high levels of education indicated that they valued the holistic, healthy development and happiness of their children more than their academic success. However, among these parents, some did convey a further desire for both holistic, happy development and also academic achievement.

The limitation of using the 'social class' lens

Clearly in most cases parents required a high degree of social mobility in order to send their children to Steiner schools. This mobility was of course a requirement due to the relatively low number of Steiner schools across the country. For most parents, if they wanted to send their children to a Steiner school, it inevitably required them to relocate. However, to read this solely along class lines, whereby the presence of social mobility is interpreted as a class

indicator, paints an extremely narrow picture. The notion of class is itself an extremely complicated concept. One may speak of class indicators, but one should also be cautious of reverse engineering causality in favour of neat categorisation. For example, one parent divorced as a result of their decision to send their child to a Steiner school; many others gave up their well-paying jobs. All of these were decisions, which may well have affected the assessment of their class status. There were many more parents who were middle class but did not give up their jobs or move cities because of their commitment to their child's education.

A study which uses a single determining factor, such as social class, in order to group Steiner parents, would risk removing importance nuances from the study. It should be noted that the desire to provide children with a holistic education is by no means limited to the middle classes. A notion which can be understood to represent a timeless value should not incorrectly be characterised as being the monopoly of a specific social substratum. The choice of Steiner education for Chinese parents certainly limits the poorest families at the moment, but it would be a narrow reading of the data to assume only middle-class parents desire the type of education Steiner schools offer.

What articles such as that of the *Economist* (2017) risk is the confusion between what might be described as the effect of neo-liberalisation, such as 'education fads' that appear to promote genuine values, and the idea that the values themselves are implicitly faulty. Thus, even if Steiner education, or alternative education in general had become desirable middle-class indicators, that fact alone would not necessitate detachment from the values those educational models may offer.

The increased privatisation of institutions may be considered to be part of an insidious attack on welfare in general as a result of market pressure: institutional monopolies are, after all, antithetical to free market competition. Due to the particular conditions of Chinese state power, however, the Western arguments concerning institutional weakening are difficult to apply directly to China. What is evident, however, is that privatisation of education in China had led to the possibility of the emergence of Steiner education in China. Therefore it was what might in the West be described as neo-liberalisation, which allowed for the presence of any alternative education in China. I would like to warn against any over simplifications which might suggest a direct casual chain and which would allow for a retrospective

rendering of Steiner education as simply an effect of neo-liberalisation in China.

The phenomena of Steiner education viewed in a dialectical manner might well be understood as the seeds of change which are also contained within its opposite. One of the defining notions of dialectics viewed from a Taoist perspective is the ability to hold two opposing thoughts together, to be comfortable with antinomies and resist the temptation to paint a linear narrative. With this in mind, I conclude that it would be a shallow analysis which dismissed the significance of Steiner education in China in relation to the fact that such education is only made possible by the privatisation of education and comes with a relatively high cost.

I am going to approach the next two sections by paying attention to my overarching question: *What is at stake in the feverish manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?* I will consider this parental choice, perceptions and experience of Steiner education at the micro and macro levels in order to discuss the unbalanced nature of the Chinese educational context in Section 11.4. In Section 11.5 I will expand on this to explore the wider theoretical dimensions of the significance of ‘Steiner Fever’ in China and consider how it may be offering a pathway to connect back to the traditional Chinese values.

11.3 Micro Level Parental Choice in the Macro Level Educational Context: The Authoritarian and Competitive Nature of Chinese Education System

Many Steiner parents whom I have interviewed claimed to want to help their children 'to become who they are'. This notion of wanting their child to develop according to their ‘spirit’ was one of the main reasons that they had chosen Steiner education (see Section 7.2). I have chosen to distinguish between an education system that treats children as an end-in-themselves as opposed to one which treats children as a mean-to-an-end. This distinction should be understood in relation to the notion of instrumentality. I am defining instrumentalised education as an education system which is oriented towards state requirements, rather than being predicated on the notion of the organic unfolding of a child’s potential or ‘spirit’.

One of the core ideas for Steiner's educational model is the existence of human essence or

spirit. The notion of 'spirit', (*Geist* in German), is foundational for German Enlightenment thinking, often understood as 'life force', or 'animating principle' of human consciousness that separates human from animals (Kant, 2002). Central to this is the notion that the child and indeed humans in general, be viewed as 'ends in themselves' and not simply as 'means to an end', a notion which Kant defined in his moral philosophy, "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" (Kant, 1993, p.36).

This approach places the individual's needs first and foremost based on the assumption that this is what will also be of greatest benefit to society at large. The intellectual and philosophical reasoning behind an education system that focuses on the child's developmental stages, is predicated upon the notion of human essence and the idea of an individual spirit unique to everyone, which needs cultivating. The education approach of Steiner can therefore be understood to seek to protect the sovereignty of the individual against a type of moral degradation that may take place if humans are considered merely as means, as cogs in institutional systems that are susceptible to political and ideological abuse.

My suggestion that the current Chinese education system is unbalanced is exemplified by the degree to which children are pressured to achieve success at such a young age. This pressure on young children negates their ability to develop in terms of self-expression and self-actualisation. The degree to which an education system is designed to uncritically 'prepare' children for any social or economic system displays the degree to which it has become blind towards its own partiality. That is to say, the Chinese education system has become out of balance with regard to the manner in which it instrumentalises learning with the aim of achieving a set of particular goals.

11.3.1 Education as institutionalisation

Education itself as a structure is both a reflection of wider social beliefs and also an active force in the institutionalisation of people with respect to those same beliefs. This is an argument supported by Illich (1983), who understood formal education as the primal institutionalising force, which skews children's beliefs at an early age before they have developed a 'healthy' mistrust of social institutions in general. That is to say, institutionalised education has an inherently conservative aspect in that it helps to socially engineer children

towards maintaining the status quo. The degree to which this is social engineering happens, I would argue, is relative to the instrumentalised nature of the education system, that is, to what degree children are taught ‘what to think’ rather than ‘how to think’ (explored in Section 9.2.2). For example, a more means-to-an-end system might privilege the merits of obedience, diligence and competition over creativity and exploration.

The manner of implementation of privileged values might be reflected in the amount of homework a school gives a child, which requires a high degree of diligence to complete. The reduction of ‘leisure time’ becomes symptomatic of a system which can be understood as too dogmatic or authoritarian, as it reduces the realistic ability for children to develop and explore their own independent thinking, not to mention the possibility of play. The volume of homework and examination pressure placed on children reflect the highly competitive nature of the current Chinese education system. As discussed in Section 2.2.4, children are ranked in relation to their examination results from a young age, and many parents felt that this ranking system effectively served to determine their child’s future prematurely. The workload and examination orientation were matters of concern for parents that were repeatedly mentioned in my findings (see Section 7.1).

The rationale of the current Chinese education system can be understood as meeting the practical needs of children by preparing them for introduction into a cut-throat work environment, in which the desire for excellent grades is exchanged for the desire for excellent wages. Under these conditions, children’s education can be seen to be instrumentalised towards the attainment of excellent grades. The one-dimensional (opposed to holistic) aspect of the Chinese education system is reflected in its insistence on an outlook which neglects the less easily monetised aspects of the human condition, such as curiosity, creativity, spirituality and care for the natural world and human life. As shown in Section 7.1 of the findings, creative subjects, such as art or music, were neglected in favour of subjects, which were understood as being ‘practical’ for modern Chinese life. Parents who were opting for Steiner education felt that fundamental aspects of their child’s development, which did not comply directly with the need to acquire of ‘excellent grades’, were being neglected. This finding is echoed by many scholars who argue against the examination-oriented education system in China that only focuses on academic quality, ignoring the cultivation of the comprehensive qualities of students, such as the moral, the physical and the aesthetic (Liu, 1995; Pan, 1997; Yi, 2011).

11.3.2 The means-to-an-end nature of Chinese education system

As has been illustrated in Section 7.1.1 Steiner parents and teachers felt the Chinese state education remains examination led despite the reforms. Much has been made of the recent education reforms within the state system in China and the move away from rote learning towards a more flexible and creative approach (see Section 2.3). However, it is still important to consider how, on a fundamental level, the Chinese education system remains locked into a means-to-an-end system. To what degree does the education system, historically geared towards children passing the *Gaokao*, which has been *reformed* in favour of creating *suzhi* (quality) students, remain fundamentally the same? The desired outcome for students may have altered from *examination-oriented* to *quality-oriented*, but what if the problem lies fundamentally within this means-to-an-end way of preparing students for a particular set of cognitive abilities or character qualities?

The Chinese state education reforms have undoubtedly aligned mainstream education more closely with contemporary concerns, such as training ‘high-level innovative talents’ in science and technology (OECD, 2016). My claim is, however, despite the much-lauded education reforms, the Chinese education system remains fundamentally unchanged in its ontology. My critique is as follows: despite the Chinese state education system reforms, it remains an means-to-an-end system. Even if it uses terms such as ‘all-around development of students’ in its educational discourses (see Section 2.3.2), it continues to be a top-down model, to the extent that it remains a system 'oriented' towards state requirements.

An important distinction needs to be made between a well-roundedness related to improved suitability to the job market and a well-roundedness in terms of ‘holistic’ human development. The undefined notion of *suzhi*, (as is laid out in Section 2.3.1,) defined somewhat inadequately as 'quality', becomes symptomatic of a flexible term, the meaning of which can change along with the state's requirement. Paying close attention to semantics becomes important because the Chinese state education and Steiner education may at first appear to use a similar language; however, the meaning behind the words can indicate different things. For example the meaning of the word ‘creativity’, changes vastly if it is understood to be instrumentalised towards achieving specific goals, or if it is understood as relating to a form of expression which remains an ‘end-in-itself’.

There is a type of creativity human beings are capable of that does not meet any specific social requirements or objectives other than a free exploration of the human condition. Creativity of this kind may be viewed as being *critical* or even anti-authoritarian, simply by virtue of its non-participatory nature. That is to say, it remains social by virtue of it being in the world, but it does not participate directly in the social sphere as a result of any conceptual constraints that the culture may either implicitly or explicitly place on it. A good example of a creative endeavour that functions in a critical manner is the series of projects produced by the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei³¹. The type of 'creativity' or 'well-rounded' quality that the Chinese state may require of its population must be recognised as having a different social function to creativity which remains free to critique prevailing social trends.

The end-in-itself model has no specific *end* goals for the children other than providing them with an education which facilitates their fundamental development into adulthood. This fundamental development into adulthood is understood as a way of developing the child in order that they may realise their *essence* in accordance with fundamental human needs, as laid out in Steiner's philosophy (see Section 3.3 for Steiner education and *anthroposophy*). Steiner education promotes a learning based on playfulness, in which creative expression is explored in a non-instrumentalised way, that is to say, creativity is recognised as having a purpose related to human development but not necessarily any instrumentalisable function.

To summarise, in this section (Section 11.3), I have concentrated on giving macro level contextualisation to parental choice with regard to Steiner education in China. I have discussed the means-to-an-end nature of the Chinese education system, which I suggest remains oriented towards 'producing' students rather than 'unfolding' them. This notion of production can be understood to be placing far too much pressure on Chinese children, something which is exemplified in the amount of testing, grade ranking and homework young children are subjected to. This pressure on Chinese children is felt by Steiner parents to be too great and in many cases provides the catalyst for seeking out an alternative to the mainstream education system in China. In the following section, I will adopt a macro level position in order to further discuss my overarching question: *What is at stake in the feverish manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?*

³¹ See Ai Weiwei's project on the tragedy of the Sichuan earthquake: 'The artwork that made me the most dangerous person in China' (Ai, 2018).

11.4 The Wider Macro-level Society and Values: The Loss of Chinese Traditional Values and Steiner Education as Part of a Rebalancing Process for Chinese Society

11.4.1 The Cultural Revolution and loss of harmony

Parents' and teachers' concerns about the continued advance of Western values in Chinese society in general is implicitly linked with their concerns about the loss of traditional Chinese values. The Steiner parents and teachers I interviewed often expressed their concern about the loss of traditional Chinese values; they felt that this was directly linked to the increased influence of what they termed 'Western' values. 'Traditional' values in China can be considered as the foundational values of the tripartite philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (see Section 2.1.1). This notion of a dynamic process of complementary and opposing forces differs greatly from the Modernist paradigm found in the West, in which new ideologies, fashions and styles are seen to replace older ones.

The notion of a delicate balance of opposing forces playing out a perpetual and shifting dynamic is articulated in the Taoist *Yin* and *Yang* symbol. The parents and teachers I interviewed felt that this delicate balance was endangered by the Chinese quest for modernisation. Certain aspects of Taoism and Buddhism were already understood to be missing from the era preceding Mao. Under Mao even Confucianism suffered, as Babones (2017) states:

Mao was so vehemently anti-Confucius that after he died in 1976 it took nearly 30 years for Confucius to come out of hiding. In 2005, Chinese President Hu Jintao unveiled his Confucian 'harmonious society' slogan without mentioning the sage by name. It was left for Hu's successor, Xi Jinping, to officially rehabilitate Confucius in a 2014 speech marking his 2,565th birthday. (p.1)

This situation must be read in relation to the radical break from traditional values during the Maoist era, which have taken many years to begin to return. For many of the parents and teachers I spoke with the existence of Steiner education in China signalled both a new acceptance of the values lost under Mao and a stimulus to further discover the depths of Chinese philosophies, as presented in Chapter 10.

Many parents and teachers spoke about Steiner education as replacing or being a pathway back to finding something which has been lost in recent Chinese culture. It can be argued that as a result of China's rapid modernisation and the social and political upheaval experienced during the Maoist era, China has forgotten its sense of spiritual, philosophical and political harmony.

At this point I would like to offer a note of caution in creating an overly simplified dualism with respect to the terms 'traditional' and 'modern'. It is certainly not my aim to create a dichotomy between past and present. As I have mentioned, the traditional values I refer to can be considered as 'timeless' values, and are only referable to as 'traditional' to the extent that they are no longer the predominant values. Therefore the dualism with regard to which I am examining the 'Steiner fever' is along the lines of remembering and forgetting of timeless values, which by definition are not to be conceptualised as being situated exclusively in the past, the present or future. Steiner education (in relation to traditional Chinese values) may be considered modern, and the experience many parents and teachers speak of is one of recognition of something in the past that has been lost. Therefore the presence of Steiner education in China could be considered to be a type of bridge between traditional values and modern life: this can be considered in relation to Farquhar's argument, "Simple dualism of the modern constitution has not explained anything, and what we need is closer attention to the nondualistic mixtures of social-natural and traditional-modern in worlds of practice" (as cited in Kipnis, 2015, p.127).

11.4.2 Anti-spirituality of modernity and disconnection from the natural world

Scholars, such as Smith (2012) and Santos (2016), have written about the production of a monoculture of scientific knowledge originating from modernity. Many contemporary societies, including contemporary Chinese society, have been founded on the belief of the inherent validity of Western conceptualisations of knowledge, while relegating indigenous and traditional perspectives to the margins. Western advancement in technology has mistakenly been viewed as an indicator of the superiority of Western ways of knowing (Pratt, et al., 2018).

In the view of Foucault (1977), (Western) modernity is marked by developments such as questioning or rejection of tradition, the prioritisation of individualism, freedom and formal

equality, faith in inevitable social, scientific and technological progress. Santos (2016) suggests that secularisation is considered to be one of the most distinctive achievements of Western modernity. The existence of the state-instituted philosophy of Confucianism since the Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD) suggests that a form of secularisation happened at a much earlier period in Chinese history than in Europe. The thought found in Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism is undoubtedly spiritual, but is not necessarily religious and was able to thrive in Chinese society which had long since given up the notion of an omnipotent deity³² (Fingarette, 1972). The Maoist era, however, strictly forbade even the philosophical thought of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and hence this sense of dialectical harmony, presented by Nisbett (2003) and which existed for 2,500 years, was lost.

As discussed in Chapter 7 and Chapter 10, a large proportion of my data suggested a deep desire for a greater emphasis on spirituality and connection to the natural world. Parents and teachers mentioned that the relationship between heaven (*tian*), earth (*di*) and human beings (*ren*) was a prevalent part of people's lives in ancient times, something that is now considered to be missing. These effects can again be related to the alienation people expressed in relation to perspectives which view the natural world primarily as resource to be exploited. Nisbett (2003) suggests that the very notion of a natural world as separate from human beings is a Greek invention,

The Greeks defined nature as the universe minus human beings and their culture. Although this seems to us to be the most obvious sort of distinction, no other civilization came upon it. A plausible account of how the Greeks happened to invent nature is that they came to make a distinction between the external, objective world and the internal, subjective one. (p.20)

This view of the natural world has largely been alien to Chinese culture, which implicitly understands human beings and nature as being entwined and irrevocably interconnected (Nisbett, 2003). Examples of this type of interconnected understanding is present in many aspects of Chinese life, from its tradition of landscape painting, Chinese medicine, martial arts or the concept of *Fengshui*. *Fengshui* is a concept for which there is no direct comparison in the West, relating to the channelling of non-visible energies in relation to architectural

³² The Zhou Dynasty (1050-771 BC) *Classic of Poetry* contains several catechistic poems questioning the authority of existence of *Shangdi* (Supreme Deity). During the Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD) the meaning of *Shangdi* morphed into a more general notion of heaven.

space. The practice falls somewhere between spirituality and science and is one of many deeply respected and widespread traditions which still inform daily life in China, as Mrs Jiang, one Steiner parent from the Beijing Steiner school, further illustrated:

In our law [in traditional Chinese culture], we have to lead a rhythmic life... like what to do in this time of the day, in this time of the season etc., this is the law of nature. Actually, in Steiner education we also follow a certain rhythm and law. (Interview, A13)

What appears to be at stake is a way of viewing the natural world and human beings as resources, which may be put to use in some manner. As has already been noted, Santos identifies Western thinking with the idea that nature be viewed as an “unlimited resource unconditionally available to human beings” (2016, p.23). What this way of viewing inherently problematises is a view which sees all phenomena is interconnected, rather than seeing single entities as extricable and expendable. I believe this notion to be key in relation to what Steiner parents say when they talk about wanting their children to ‘become who they are’ or to recognise their ‘spirit’ as their unfolding potential, rather than viewing their children as ‘resources’ or as ‘units of technology or knowledge’ (Interview, Z2). As Hoffman (2010) has noted, mainstream Chinese education attempts to cultivate citizens according to the requirements of the state and the market. With this in mind, what may become visible is the connection between the notion of nature as resource and human beings as a resource, as opposed to a way of thinking which views human beings and nature as spiritually intertwined.

In the next section, I will expand on ideas in this section relating to ideas of coloniality and how the presence of Steiner education in China might be perceived in this regard. Following this, I will present my theoretical development and the notion of the ‘institutional-paradigmatic gap’.

11.5 Theoretical Development: Paradigm Gap

11.5.1 Critical perspective on coloniality and Steiner education

Coloniality can be seen as a system that "defines the organization and dissemination of epistemic, material, and aesthetic resources in ways that reproduce modernity's imperial project" (Andreotti & Stein, 2015, p.23). In other words, coloniality represents spaciality (expansionist control of lands), onto-epistemic racism (elimination and subjugation of difference) and geopolitics of knowledge production (epistemic violence) that are constitutive of modernity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). What Said (1978) has referred to as 'positional superiority' is helpful when conceptualising the ways in which knowledge and culture were part of imperialism, through which the West came to 'know' the 'Oriental' communities. Indigenous forms of knowledge were regarded as 'new discoveries' by Western science, and "the globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civilized' knowledge" (Smith, 2012, p.63).

At this stage I would like to consider where to situate the phenomenon of 'Steiner Fever' in China in relation to the critiques of modernity and coloniality. The question of coloniality in relation to Steiner education in China, I will suggest, largely rests on the focal range of the lens through which one views the issue. As has been noted by Gordon (cited in Houghton, 2012), the establishment of Steiner schools outside of Europe could be considered a form of spiritual colonialism. If one studies the matter with an eye for the particularities and paying less attention to the universal values which may be present within Steiner education, then one may well agree with the views of Gordon. I would like to stress that Gordon's views are related to Steiner education in the general global context and certainly relate to relevant and valid concerns. In the context of my study, adopting a more macro perspective, one may share the opinion of many of the Chinese Steiner parents I spoke to that Steiner's spirituality complemented their own. The issue is clearly complex and it is not my wish or my task to take a strong position, rather I will explore some of the factors for consideration in the following paragraphs. The question of coloniality will in many ways remain a present theme throughout the remainder of Chapter 11, as many of the themes relate to the issue, either directly or indirectly.

As I have discussed in Section 3.4, there are numerous instances of Steiner education being criticised for being self-referential and not moving with the times (e.g. Boland, 2015; Ullrich, 2008). Scholars, such as da Souza, criticise the Steiner curriculum that "privileges a certain body of knowledge (it is visibly Eurocentric)" (2012, p.60). As a result, teachers and academics who are connected to Steiner school communities on different continents have begun to draw attention to issues concerning the contextualisation and localisation of Steiner education and, specifically, how it manifests itself in non-European contexts (Boland, 2015; Rawson, 2010).

Oberman (2008) argued that 'normative constructs' within the Steiner curriculum limited processes of adaptation to local cultural contexts. "The curriculum remains remarkably unchanged, even under the last decade's pressures to disavow Eurocentrism [...] even in inner-city Milwaukee, the Waldorf teachers continue to tell the Norse myth of Odin and Thor" (p.13). This opinion echoes criticism, both within and outside the movement, about the unquestioning continuation of past curricular and pedagogical models (see Boland, 2015; Wiechert, 2014).

To some extent, this criticism rings true in the Steiner schools in Chinese settings, as many teachers I talked to did question why they needed to teach the Norse myth of 'Odin and Thor' in Chinese Steiner schools. However, many of them also made a move to adapt the curriculum accordingly and taught Chinese myths instead, which, considering the archetypal nature of myths, allowed their relevance to transcend cultural specificities and appeared to be a perfectly acceptable modification on the part of the Chinese schools. My study revealed that it was not unusual for Chinese teachers to incorporate traditional Chinese knowledge of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism as a way of interpreting *anthroposophy* and Steiner education (see Section 10.1).

11.5.2 Steiner spirituality embedded in experience

As discussed in Chapter 10, my data suggest that for Chinese parents the philosophical and spiritual foundations was an important factor in their opting for Steiner over other schools which offered similar pedagogical approaches. While it is true that parents on the whole were not informed about *anthroposophy* in a detailed manner, they displayed at least a superficial understanding of Steiner's key theoretical components. I would like to consider this claim in

relation to this quote from a European Steiner teacher and academic scholar called Uceda living in Spain.

Currently, most of the families who send their children to these schools are not motivated by the principles of *anthroposophy* or by the theoretical foundations of their pedagogy, but rather by the rhythms of learning which are more organic, the centrality of the art components of the curriculum, the relationship with nature, and the cultivation of an ecological consciousness. Within the contemporary educational landscape, for a public eager for alternatives in education, Steiner schools have found their place by distancing themselves from dominant paradigms grounded in effectiveness and measurement. (Uceda, 2016, p.17)

This assessment of parents' choices within a European context are in line with the findings in my MPhil study on Steiner education in England (Sun, 2015), and these claims also concur with my findings in this study of the Chinese context. Chinese Steiner parents were rarely familiar with the specific content of *anthroposophy*. Their motivation towards Steiner education lay less in its theory and more in its experiential aspects. What Uceda usefully notes is the notion of the 'rhythm' of learning, something which is different from the specific content of learning. This is an important distinction when considering the relevance of the presence of spirituality within the Chinese context.

The spiritual approach of Steiner education need not be identical in content to the ancient Chinese practises of Buddhism and Taoism. The significance of spirituality in Steiner education is felt primarily at the level of an underlying pattern, or rhythm, what might be described as a 'way' or 'Tao'. It is related to the internal relation of one's spiritual life to being as a whole, rather than the specific cultural contexts in which that may be expressed. That is to say, Chinese parents may appreciate aspects of Steiner education not necessarily because it shares specific content with, Taoism, for example, rather that it expresses a recognisable rhythm or attunement with a way of being. The underlying patternations of expression, which are articulated in Steiner education, may be recognisable to Chinese people who are familiar with traditional Chinese values.

As I have already noted in section 11.4.1 in relation to the issue of creating false dualisms between traditional and modern values, it is important to recognise the potential dualism created between the perceived values contained within Eastern and Western philosophical

and theological traditions. There are of course many points of cross-over between the two traditions, and for many philosophers and thinkers in the West the Cartesian-Newtonian mechanistic worldview is considered dualistic and insufficient in its ability to express the complexity of existence and account for notions of human freedom and spirituality. Thinkers such as Heidegger have made particular efforts to integrate holistic aspects of Zen Buddhism and Taoism into the German philosophical tradition (Pattison, 2000). The emergence of Steiner education in China can be considered as part of this conversation between East and West, which aims at moving past simple dualisms towards more holistic views.

The Tao of everyday life

An important point of difference with respect to the European context is what I have referred to as Chinese ‘indigenous knowledges’ in Section 4.1. This is the manner in which Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism has historically influenced Chinese citizens in their daily life. What might be pejoratively described in the West as 'pseudoscience', that which is not easily categorisable as either science or spirituality, such as the notion of the 'Tao', is a common element of Chinese life.

The existence of Taoism in Chinese culture is deeply felt yet often subtle and therefore difficult to illustrate. Taoism is as much a way of life as it is a philosophy or spiritual practice. The pervasive nature of the ‘Tao’ in Chinese culture can be hard to grasp and appreciate from a Western perspective:

Tao is vital to those timeless teachings of Chinese religion, philosophy, and the humanities that are unfamiliar to the occidental layman... The meaning of Tao exists in Chinese everyday life as an omnipresent ubiquitous awareness grasped by even the poorest peasant. In this light, 'Tao' is like other words that are so basic to us they defy simple definition - like 'goodness', 'wrong', or 'freedom', yet whose profound meanings we understand, though perhaps only viscerally. (Liu, 1979, p.1)

What this makes clear is that the Tao’s epistemological foundations are inseparable from its lived experiential form. The ‘Tao’, concerned as it is with a transmutable 'way', can notionally move from noun to verb to adjective to fit the purpose of meaning. It is by its very nature non-dogmatic and non-prescriptive. There is less room for an

epistemological-experiential gap to be made possible within Chinese culture with regard to the '*Tao*', since it is not merely a way of knowing, but relates to a more fundamental notion of being.

The embeddedness of implicitly spiritual notions, such as the 'Tao', within Chinese everyday life helps explain the affinity with ideas found in *anthroposophy* and Steiner educational practices, which many Chinese Steiner parents and teachers expressed. Traditional Chinese thinking tends towards a holistic perspective. What is missing from contemporary Chinese cultural life are institutions which replicate and nurture these seemingly fundamental Chinese perspectives. We can therefore begin to consider the notion of an institutional-paradigmatic gap, that is to say, the social institutions do not reflect the embedded belief of the Chinese population, such as the 'Tao'. What remains unique and seemingly so enthralling for many of the Chinese Steiner parents and teachers I spoke with was that Steiner schools represented a rare opportunity to experience their holistic perspectives, reflected back in an institutionalised and organised form. As Steiner himself noted, “A healthy social life is found only when, in the mirror of each soul, the whole community finds its reflection, and when, in the whole community, the virtue of each one is living.” (1977, p.117).

Anyone who has ever found themselves in a foreign country, without recourse to the ability to communicate in the local tongue may understand the sense of disorientation this experience can engender and consequently the relief, even sense of joy, one feels at having their expressions met with a sympathetic smile, indicative of the understanding of another. My feeling is that Chinese Steiner parents experience a similar sense of recognition in what may be termed, the values, beliefs, philosophies or ways of being, which are reflected at an experiential level in Steiner schools.

11.5.3 Institutional-paradigmatic gap

Every culture embeds within its taken-for-granted common knowledge some notions about what is real. Embedded in the human perceptual apparatus is an intuitive classification of what we experience, including an intuitive physics and an intuitive psychology; and we know how to distinguish reality from imagination. Ontology is the careful critique of these common-sense intuitive notions with a view to finding out what is most fundamental to

everything that is. It the study of existence itself considered apart from any existent object. (Flew, 1999, as cited in Meacham, 2017, para. 3).

Understanding ancient Chinese thinking remains key to drawing any conclusions with regard to the significance of Steiner education in China, or to be more specific, the relationship between the thought contained within traditional Chinese philosophies and that of the modern Chinese institutions. As I have laid out in Section 2.1 and in Chapter 10, traditional Chinese values suffered something of an identity crisis during the period of modernisation. This led Chinese policy-makers to abandon 2,500 years of philosophical tradition, a process that was radically accelerated during the Maoist era and continued after the Opening-Up policy of 1978. In an informal conversation during my fieldwork, a Steiner teacher offered this telling insight, ‘Regarding Chinese cultural heritage and development, it became stunted on the institutional level. The Marxist-Leninist materialist thought led by our communist Party is contradictory to the culture of Yin-Yang.’ At an institutional level ancient Chinese values were forsaken in a quest to adopt a Western paradigm in the name of modernisation. This process has been made extremely evident in Chinese education, which has emphasised competition and achievement of good examination results over more holistic approaches.

The Chinese perspective of fundamental 'being' or 'reality' sees it as a relational process in which two opposing elements carry the seeds of the other within them. Due to the nature of the traditional Chinese ‘Tao’ the notion that ontology and epistemology are viewed as separate philosophical fields disappears. The very notion of two separate fields of inquiry relating to ‘knowing’ and ‘being’, already inhabits a set of presuppositions which the ‘Tao’ cannot account for. For example, epistemology presupposes that there is knowledge to be ‘known’, the ‘Tao’, however, refers to the ‘way’, that cannot be ‘known’. The ‘Tao’, to the degree that it can be said to be *concerned* with anything, is related to the condition that allows for the possibility of ontology and epistemology rather than the content related to these fields of inquiry, which could be considered as arbitrary predetermined categorisations.

This I believe is what lies at the heart of the current imbalance within culture. Institutionally China is informed by a Western paradigm, which distinguishes between disciplines of scientific and philosophical enquiry related to the fields of epistemology and ontology. Chinese thinking, however, could be described as supra-ontological, since it relates as such to a ‘before’ or ‘beyond’ the creation of a field of understanding related to being or knowing. In

order to understand this paradigmatic distinction, we must consider that a Western perspective which understands the disciplines of ontology and epistemology relates to thinkers such as Aristotle and Pre-Socratics such as Parmenides and Heraclitus. As Wang (2007) states,

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle defines the first philosophy, which seeks, “the principles and the highest causes”, as a science that “investigates being *qua* being and what belongs essentially to it [...] In contrast, early Confucian teachings, as well as mainstream early Chinese thinking in general, have little to do with metaphysics. (p.204)

China, on the other hand, with its notion of the ‘Tao’, could be understood to have maintained a transdisciplinary approach in that the ‘Tao’ pertains to a type of relationship with existence that precedes the division of disciplines into ontology and epistemology (see Section 1.4).

To be precise the notion of a ‘paradigm gap’ may be more accurately described as a ‘gap’ between modern Chinese institutions, which have adopted a Western paradigm and the implications inherent in the ‘Tao’. The paradigm of Western thought is that it contains the division of ‘knowing’ and ‘being’ relative to the disciplines of epistemology and ontology. At its most fundamental level, the paradigm of Chinese thought, to the extent that it concurs with the ‘Tao’, recognises no such divisions. Again Wang (2007) points out,

The major concern for early Chinese thinkers comprises neither the search for any supernatural reality or divinity as the first or highest cause nor the determination of any permanent rational principles in nature and human society. Rather, the guiding question of early Chinese thinking is the question of *dao* [Tao]. (p.204)

The institutional adoption of a Western paradigm has resulted in the creation of something of an identity crisis within modern China. The rapid adoption of Western perspectives in Chinese institutions has created discord between administered life and the life of the individual who still ‘remembers’ ancient Chinese wisdom. At the heart of this discord lies the notion that Chinese thought remains rooted in the ancient philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

My use of a transdisciplinary approach is one that gives consideration to the essence of paradigmatic thinking and the notion of division in the most fundamental sense. Within the Western paradigm, the field of ontology pertains to what might be considered the most fundamental philosophical concerns of existence. However, precisely because ontology is understood as the discipline relating to 'being', it forgets that it exists within a pre-illuminated space. The disciplines, ontology (metaphysics) and epistemology are related to the thinkable made visible by a 'light', which by dint of its illuminating quality, itself remains invisible. That is to say, we 'see' (i.e. think) what light illuminates for us, (ontology and epistemology), not the light itself. The Tao on the other hand, relates to a more fundamental condition, what might be thought of as the unknowable light source, that which remains 'unknowable' precisely because it provides the conditions for the possibility of knowing.

Steiner education has become significant for China in that it represents an institutional framework that embodies a Chinese paradigm. Steiner education represents a transdisciplinary perspective that does not run in contradistinction to ancient Chinese wisdom, and for that reason does not perpetuate the fundamental discord between individuals and the institutions that serve them. In order to help explain this notion of transdisciplinary in relation to Steiner education, it is worth returning to a quote from Goethe, one of Steiner's main theoretical influences, "If we want to attain a living understanding of nature, we must become as flexible and mobile as nature herself" (Goethe, 1995, p.62). The key here is the notion of a 'living understanding', which I relate to the notion of transdisciplinary. The 'flexibility' and 'mobility' of nature must be present in humans, as humans are a part of nature. Indeed it could be said that humans are nature which has become 'disciplined' by rational consciousness. Nature can be understood to be the representation of trans-disciplinarity par excellence in its flexible mobility. In this context transdisciplinary in relation to education may refer to a view of the human condition, which reserves the ability of humans to transcend their own disciplinarity (the rational conditions as proclaimed by Descartes³³), and become as 'flexible and mobile as nature'. It is this sense of an intermingling of the flexibility of nature and that of the human condition, which allows for human harmony with the world in the broadest sense. It is this feeling for harmony which I believe remains at the heart of holistic education.

³³ Descartes' famous statement was "cogito, ergo sum", often translated as "I think, therefore I am".

As has been noted in Section 3.3 and 11.3, Steiner education represents an 'ends-in-themselves' approach that treats students as part of an interconnected web in which their development must be unfolded in accordance with its organic essence. It is for this reason many parents claimed they felt 'at home' or 'familiar' with Steiner education, some even saying it felt 'Chinese', as I presented in Chapter 10.

An education system which imposes in a 'means-to-an-end' manner what is worthy of knowing is clearly running contrary to traditional Chinese beliefs:

For the Chinese, that web has no weaver, no creator; in the West the final concern is always the creator or cause and the phenomenon is merely its reflection. The Western mind seeks to discover and encounter what is beyond, behind, or the cause of the phenomena. [...] Knowledge, within the Chinese framework, consists in the accurate perception of the inner movement of the web of phenomena. The desire for knowledge is the desire to understand the interrelationships or patterns within that web, and to become attuned to the unseen dynamic. (Kaptchuk, 1983, p.15)

From a Chinese perspective, we can consider the institutions, which have developed during the modernisation process to be fundamentally 'out of sync' with the inner feelings of the individual. This sense of imbalance creates a sickness at the level of society, of which the 'Steiner Fever' may be understood to be a symptom.

If we take a lead from a Chinese medicine perspective, then a pattern of disharmony has significance and making sense of it means perceiving the relationships between all the patient's signs and symptoms (Li, 2018). At the same time, as a medical term, the fever is also a healing path: fever is a great defence with the body employs against disease, and the body makes a fever to help the immune system to work better against infected cells without harming the body.

11.6 Conclusion

As discussed in Section 7.3.3, in relation to the *push* and *pull* factors concerning parental choice of Steiner education in China, I have argued that these factors should not be

understood independently but rather dialectically and as being interrelated. With this in mind, I would like to suggest that the aspects of Chinese traditional culture that appear to be ‘remembered’ in Steiner education must have first been ‘forgotten’ in Chinese state education system. That is to say, in order to remember, one must have first forgotten; the acts are inextricably tied together. Ideas that parents mentioned, such as ‘unfolding of the whole child’, are not new notions, rather they represent ancient values which have gained new articulations and new significances relative to historical and social contexts.

I have presented Steiner education as a type of shelter for memory, which may allow Chinese people to remember aspects of their own traditional culture. I do not, however, wish to posit the notion that Steiner education is bringing something extraneous to Chinese culture, which it was lacking. This suggestion would lead rather quickly to accusations of spiritual or cultural *coloniality*. The point of my investigation for this thesis is not to frame the presence of Steiner education in China as the direct answer to any perceived problem. Rather my approach is to keep in mind the Taoist notion of *Yin* and *Yang*, which expresses the existence of opposing and interpenetrating forces that make each other comprehensible (Nisbett, 2003). In thinking about the essence of Steiner education as relating to a type of memory, there is an implicit question which asks ‘How might the essence of the current Chinese state education be framed? Can it be considered as a type of forgetting?’ In order to investigate these questions further, I will take a brief detour into the world of organic vegetables.

As has been noted in Chapter 3, the naming of a notion implies a sense of autonomy or separation, that is, the concept of ‘organic vegetables’ only becomes conceivable under conditions of modern farming, which allows for a separation between the concept of ‘vegetables’ and that of ‘organic vegetables’. The fact that in modern times we need to label vegetables ‘organic’ perhaps should strike us as strange; after all, all vegetables before pesticides were *organic*. What modern life appears to do so well is frame a concept such as ‘organic’ or ‘holistic’ as something ‘new’ and exciting, even as a desirable middle-class indicator, when in actuality, such concepts refer to things in their original and embedded essence. What the existence of these terms represents is a type of forgetting, an ontological rewiring of what is considered normal.

If concepts such as organic and holistic are embedded in life, they can be understood to be so present to humans as to be invisible. When these concepts become separated or understood

autonomously, they can be sold back to us in a fetishised form, as something extraneous to life. This state of affairs serves to keep individuals suspended like Tantalus, chasing after deep-seated desires, such as raising a well-rounded child. All too often, however, parents will remain locked within a sense of anxiety when only the superficial characterisations of what that concept actually entails remain once the nourishing element has been lost or forgotten.

What is at stake is to be found in the differing paradigmatic assumptions contained within Steiner education and the Chinese state education. As I noted at the start of this chapter, there is no such thing as a neutral education; it should be considered as a given that the notion of education necessitates ontological assumptions (Pratt, et al., 2018). Steiner education can be understood as preserving and engendering a type of relationship with the natural world and to 'being' itself, which has been forgotten by modern society. What has been forgotten can be articulated as the 'spirit of things', the life force, which, for example, allows a tree (noun) to *tree* (verb). What is contained in the notion of the movement from noun to verb is also contained in the 'Tao', that all things have a 'way'. With respect to education, the child is viewed as having a nature or 'way'; the teacher's role is to help unfold that nature so that it may become manifest.

When things (objects and people) are viewed in relation to their resource value, a view of life is created which ceases to recognise the essence, or the 'way', of the object. Under these conditions the 'way' of the object becomes subsumed to the instrumentalised value that the object may acquire; in the example of a tree, the use of its wood for timber. With respect to education, this way of viewing people will focus on schooling, which prepares rather than unfolds children. Educational value may be confused with the mere acquisition of good examination results and scholarly grades and may pay little heed to the animating force of the individual.

With this in mind, I will return to a consideration of my overarching question: *What is at stake in the feverish manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?* As, I hope I have demonstrated, Steiner education offers a potential pathway back for Chinese people to 'remember' aspects of their own traditional ways of being, which have become dis-embedded in the course of the modernisation process. As is argued by Santos (2016), "The idea of alternatives presupposes the idea of normalcy" and "the designation of something as an alternative carries a latent connotation of subalternity" (p.189). For example,

there is the case of traditional Chinese medicine, which is based on more than 2,500 years of Chinese medical practice and has been widely used in China and some other East Asian countries. To consider traditional Chinese medicine as ‘alternative’ to biomedicine amounts to a gross rewriting of history from a deeply positivist perspective. Therefore what is at stake is that Steiner education may no longer be thought of as an alternative education; rather that mainstream education is an *alternative* education, which has forgotten its spiritual origin. What this represents is a memory, a memory of having forgotten that clean air was once known as air, that organic vegetables were once vegetables, and holistic education was once simply education.

Embedded	Disembedded	Section
Nature	Natural resources	Section 11.4.2
Air	Clean air	Section 3.2.2
Vegetable	Organic vegetable	Section 11.6
Chinese values	Traditional Chinese values	Section 11.4
Education	Holistic education	Section 3.2
Child	Whole child	Section 3.3

Table 11.3 Summary of 'Disembedded' Memory in this Thesis

In this chapter, I have attempted to move between reflecting on the micro aspects, such as the particular dilemmas Steiner parents face in relation to their school choice, and helping to situate such issues within a larger macro picture.

I have suggested that Steiner education has not simply imported a Western version of spirituality available only to middle-class Chinese parents, rather that Steiner education’s presence in China should be understood dialectically. That is to say, the seeds of its origin were sown in the means-to-an-end nature of the Chinese state education system, which ‘forgets’ the spiritual dimension within human life. I have argued that Steiner education provides something of a ‘shelter’ for traditional Chinese values, which have become internally colonised by modernity in China. The ‘forgetting’ of traditional Chinese values by Chinese institutions has resulted in what I have termed an institutional paradigmatic gap. It is my contention that the confluences and similarities between Steiner education and traditional Chinese values that have been explored so far in this thesis are the result of supra-ontologies

based on ‘timeless’ universal ideas, such as a holistic view of existence. With this in mind, Chinese traditional values can be understood to be in a paratactical relationship with Steiner education values, with the notion of ‘holism’ providing the central position around which these frameworks orbit.

In the final chapter, I will conclude the thesis with a discussion of limitations, scholarly contribution of the work, its implications, and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 12 Conclusion

I approached this study with a broad research question: *What is at stake in the feverish manner in which Steiner education has been embraced in China?* Guided by the research aims and the three research questions specified in Chapter 1, I attempted to explore the ‘Steiner Fever’ phenomenon in China, from the perspectives of parents and teachers in particular. I took a transdisciplinary, dialectical approach, with a conceptual framework inspired by the notion of ‘Tao’, in which events are never thought of as occurring in isolation but are embedded in a meaningful whole. Through my 10-month ethnographic fieldwork at two Steiner schools in China, I have examined the *push* and *pull* factors related to parents and teachers' choices, the complexity of their experiences of Steiner education, as well as how they conceptualised the relationship between Steiner education principles and traditional Chinese values. Guided by my conceptual framework, I have discussed the findings at both the micro level, namely, parents’ and teachers’ decision-making and experiences of Steiner education, and at the macro level, that is, the educational context, society and values, including the dysfunction of mainstream education and the spiritual crisis in the wider materialism-oriented society in China.

I have argued that Steiner education offers a potential pathway back for Chinese people to reconnect with aspects of their own traditional ways of being, which have become dis-embedded through the process of modernisation. What is at *stake* relates to what is contained implicitly in the possibility for a ‘forgotten’ form of consciousness in which a human relationship to existence remembers its ‘spirit’, the animating force in consciousness and the *essence* of the natural world. My emphasis has been on discussing what might be thought of as a the collaborative project of Steiner education, which keeps the flame of timeless values *alive* in an institutionalised form, so that they may continue to be *remembered* for time to come.

This final chapter of the thesis is divided into several sections. I firstly evaluate the quality and discuss the limitations of this study. After that, I highlight my contribution to knowledge at empirical, methodological and theoretical levels. From there, I discuss implications of this

study and directions for the future. I conclude my thesis with reflections on my PhD journey.

12.1 Study Evaluation

12.1.1 Quality

The trustworthiness of the study was achieved by taking action to address credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability, as explained in Section 5.3. In addition, I also took four different types of triangulation into account (in Section 5.3.1), and discussed issues concerning generalisability (in Section 5.3.2) and how I adopted member checks as a way of strengthening this study (in Section 5.3.3).

With regard to the ethics of the research, I employed the ethical guidelines laid out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2012), with special consideration of what this would mean in the Chinese context. I took particular notice of issues concerning consent, protection of participants and confidentiality (see Section 4.5.1) and discussed ethical issues that are specific to ethnographic studies (see Section 4.5.2). In addition, I have elaborated in detail on how I was building and taking care of relationships with my participants during my fieldwork (see Section 6.3).

Ethnographic studies often run into challenges along the way that have to be dealt with in the moment. Looking back, I do not feel that any of the issues encountered during this process were of such a nature that they risked endangering participants or invalidating the data. Overall, based on what I judge to be the successful generation of data, protection of participants, and acquisition of knowledge, I found this study successful. However, given the restricted time and resources, there were some limitations that should be addressed.

12.1.2 Limitations

Researching the 'Steiner Fever' in China is not an easy undertaking, given the considerable complexity of its nature. The present study has the following limitations.

Firstly, one inherent limitation with regard to ethnographic study relates to that of the

generalisability. This study focused on just two Steiner schools in China, and issues of transferability of the findings to other Steiner schools could arise. In Section 4.3, I have discussed why these two Steiner schools were chosen to provide a better understanding of the selection rationale and process. With the sample size of 55 participants in total, it is clear that my findings are not representative of all parents' and teachers' perceptions and experiences in the domain of Steiner education in contemporary China. I situated this study at two Steiner schools which are more established and mature than many other Chinese Steiner schools and are located in, or on the outskirts of, major cities, Beijing and Chengdu. These naturally may not reflect all contexts, in particular, the newer Steiner schools that have been founded in the recent years or the schools that are located in remote rural China. However, these findings in their richness do offer insights that can be used to illuminate this wider social and cultural landscape.

The second limitation of this study is that, as hinted at by the term 'Steiner Fever', this is a fast-changing phenomenon, and my findings and discussions may not reflect the up-to-date situation of Steiner education in China. At the point of presentation, the situation in Chinese Steiner schools is changing dramatically; for example, a few unlicensed Steiner schools are obtaining their legal status, whilst other Steiner schools are being shut down by the government. With this in mind, I felt the use of a strong theoretical lens at the start of my fieldwork would not allow for the degree of spontaneity I felt necessary: I tried to allow the study to unfold in front of my eyes. Employing a strong theoretical lens would have felt like overdetermination of my data, which would have risked a blinkered approach and the temptation to instrumentalise my findings.

Thirdly, in this study, I was the only coder when it came to analysing interviews and observational field notes, as well as developing codes and themes later on. Therefore there was always the possibility of researcher bias in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Coding of interviews and observational field notes was extremely time-consuming and required a high degree of familiarity with the data, which made it unrealistic and impractical for me to employ another coder to conduct the work. Also, there is no consensus whether the use of inter-rater (inter-coder) reliability is beneficial for thematic analysis (see Charmaz, 1983). The use of inter-rater reliability scores presupposes the assumption that there exists an objective reality in the data that can be captured through coding. Therefore, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines closely in my coding process. I have checked through the data

several times to ensure the quality of coding and generation of themes (see Section 5.2 for the detailed procedure of my data analysis).

Further, my position as someone who had taken Steiner teacher training could be both an advantage and disadvantage. I enrolled in the part-time Steiner Teacher Training in the UK over 2015 to 2018, which was a conscious decision for me to familiarise myself with the terminology used, and the world experienced, (and the paradigm lived,) by participants at the Steiner schools. This offered me the advantage of being an ‘insider’ in Steiner education: I was able to gain access to Steiner communities in China, establish a rapport with, and ensure the comfort of, the people in Steiner communities. As a result, I was able to obtain rich, in-depth data. However, the potential bias, resulting from my pre-existing knowledge of Steiner education, might have affected my desire to maintain a ‘disinterested’ ear in relation to my findings. To minimise such bias, I took certain measures, for example, I followed interview schedules closely and was mindful not to impose my personal views when conducting interviews. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that the researcher should not waste time trying to eliminate ‘investigator effects’ but rather concentrating on understanding those effects. I therefore kept a research diary to record my thought processes and experiences throughout this research (see Section 4.2.2). I was also aware of the pitfall of ‘going native’, which refers to over-identifying with the respondents, and losing the ethnographer’s twin perspectives of her ‘research’ outlook (Delamont, 2002). In this case, during my fieldwork, it was helpful to conduct out-of-school discussions and data analysis, so as to stand back and distance myself from the participants, as well as keeping reflexivity in mind and practice (see Section 4.2.2).

Lastly, although I refer to Chinese state schools as mainstream schools, they are not a monolithic group of schools. There is considerable variation in practice within the mainstream sector of schools, which should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

12.2 Scholarly Contributions

This research contributes broadly to the existing body of literature on Steiner education, alternative education, holistic education and parental choice of school in China, but also

makes specific and original empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions. This section highlights the key contributions of my study.

12.2.1 Empirical

There is a distinct lack of studies examining reasons for parents opting for alternative education in China. I consider my current study a useful addition to a growing body of empirical literature in alternative education in China and a way of enhancing our understanding of parental choice of alternative education. Not only did my research examine ‘why’ parents had chosen a particular school, I also paid specific attention to ‘how’ they chose and their experience of the school after making the choice. My study provides what is termed in ethnography as ‘thick descriptions’ in relation to the parental decision-making process and experience of the schools. This study also contributes to the empirical research on Steiner education in China (as well as internationally) at what many education researchers view to be an exciting and pivotal time for alternative education within the Chinese context. China’s position on the world stage is becoming ever more prominent and the rest of the world is looking towards China with increasing interest. China’s education policy therefore will be of relevance to many who need to understand the experience of the future generations emerging from the differing Chinese school systems.

12.2.2 Methodological

While the arguments presented in this thesis may be limited in terms of their generalisability, the data collected through ethnographic methods in the two Steiner schools do offer insights into the Steiner education fever that are unlikely to have been achieved with other methods.

As I have discussed in Section 4.2, many ethnographic studies have overlooked the ‘paradigm gap’. However, each culture should be understood as carrying its own ontology and epistemology. I have therefore attempted to conduct my ethnographic study with the requisite sensitivity towards paradigm differences and with awareness that many participants might be embedded in a different paradigm from mine. I have paid intellectual respect to the idea that terms such as ‘ontology’, ‘epistemology’ and ‘paradigm’ already imply a Western tradition of metaphysical thinking. In Chapter 11, I have also discussed the importance of considering epistemological and ontological perspectives when analysing my empirical data.

I also consider my study a useful addition to the growing body of research situated in the non-mainstream, non-Western paradigms. This project has made a unique attempt to address the issue of translation, from indigenous to academic, from trans- or non-disciplinarity to disciplinarity and of course when it comes to languages, from Chinese to English. I have achieved this by incorporating the ‘two-eyed seeing’ (Ermine, 2007), one eye situated in the traditional Chinese way of knowing and paradigm, with the notion of ‘Tao’, and the other eye in Western knowledge and ways of knowing, together with ethnographic design and methods.

12.2.3 Theoretical

In this research, I have made several key theoretical contributions. Firstly, I attempted to engage with the philosophical dimensions of my content in a critical manner. Rather than using theory in an instrumentalised manner, my approach often involved using a philosophical idea as a starting point from which to critically and creatively expand on my findings. My theoretical discussion often unfolded itself, as I attempted to think outwards from the ‘form’ or *essence* of concepts. This type of concept-oriented thinking was an attempt at bottom-up thinking. Rather than imposing a strong theoretical lens and discussing the pros and cons, I attempted to ‘listen’ to what was theoretically relevant in a specific context and expand from that point. Moreover, I have discussed the limitation of viewing this Steiner movement merely through the ‘social class’ lens and painting class privilege as the only conclusion. Instead, I approached this phenomenon with caution and respect rather than jumping to conclusions.

Secondly, I tried to link the perceptions and experience of parents in the Steiner movement to a macro level, the social, historical, etc. context of China. In this respect I attempted to refine the focus of my lens as much as possible, in order to capture the specific details, personal aspects and very human elements of my study and relate this to as deep and macro a picture as I felt was possible. This ‘depth of field’ in my discussion was a significant aspect for me, as I wanted to do justice to the ways of thinking contained within Chinese culture and Steiner education, both of which required significant intellectual and imaginative engagement to allow me to grasp them.

Thirdly, I have conceptually and theoretically unpacked such words as ‘alternative’, ‘holistic education’ and ‘spirituality’. Again I attempted to do so in an original manner, which paid

attention to existing literature but also to those elements of understanding I felt were already contained within me as a-priori intuition. It is tempting as a researcher to keep a safe distance when discussing topics such as spirituality. I have attempted to be self-reflective about the hermeneutical challenge these terms present and have in turn made that a significant aspect of my theoretical contribution. My particular attention to the hermeneutic question was out of respect for the differing ways of thinking present in Western and Chinese culture. This is not to say that translation is impossible, but that it requires specific attention and careful respect. With this in mind I have attempted to approach the issue of translation of terms used in interviews, and also in their general academic usage in the Western and Chinese contexts, with the respect a translator may pay when interpreting a poem. That is to say, I have attempted to keep closely in mind at all times the importance contained within the notion of *essence*.

Further, often there appears to be a degree of misunderstanding related to Steiner education, exemplified in descriptions such as ‘quirky’ (“China’s Yuppies”, 2017). In general there appears to be a lack of serious academic scholarship focusing on Steiner education, perhaps due to the fact that it is not easily categorisable. I feel an important aspect of my contribution is to pay Steiner education the correct respect it deserves and not treat it simply as some passing educational fad. I have investigated Steiner education in-depth at both intellectual and experiential levels in order to understand what it may contribute towards human understanding in general.

Last but not least, I have identified the notion of the ‘institutional paradigmatic gap’ that exists between Chinese institutions and the implications inherent in the ‘Tao’ of the everyday life of Chinese people. This gap is a result of the rapid adoption of Western paradigms by Chinese institutions during the modernisation process. This has created an ‘identity crisis’ within modern China, and a discord between administered life and the inner ‘feelings’ of the individuals who still ‘remember’ ancient Chinese wisdom. This is one significant theoretical contribution of my study, which, it is hoped will open up discussions on this topic.

12.3 Implications and Directions for Future Research

In light of the questions my study sought to address, the outcomes it arrived at, and the

discussion it generated, I present here directions for the future. I start this section with key implications for policy-makers and education practitioners, and I will conclude with a list of suggestions for future research.

12.3.1 Implications for policy-makers and education practitioners

It was not the primary purpose of this thesis to propose prescriptive solutions to the challenges faced by Steiner education in China and Chinese education in general. The purpose was rather to explore the perceptions and experiences of Chinese parents and teachers who opted out of the mainstream education system and chose Steiner education. In doing so, I aimed to communicate reflections on the mainstream education in China and on what the ‘essence’ of education is. To this end, I suggest that seeing Steiner education as a viable alternative to mainstream education in China will help recast what is considered normal or mainstream. Providing an alternative, even a niche alternative, it may help to create the view that the status quo is merely one option among many possible options. Steiner education may provide an alternative framework that informs and inspires educators to think about ways to create a learning community that nurtures children's capacity to become whole human beings in a world that is becoming increasingly mechanised. It is my recommendation that policy-makers in China seek to encourage dialogue, understanding, and mutual sharing and learning between the Steiner and mainstream schools.

This study provides insights into non-hegemonic, non-mainstream, alternative forms of education that might be used to challenge the normative form of education in Chinese society, and the reasons parents and educators choose to become involved in these activities. This study on ‘Steiner Fever’ may serve as a rich source of information about Chinese education. Without knowing why some parents choose alternative education in China, Chinese education administrators cannot adequately meet the educational needs of students as well as those of parents.

In addition, I have proposed that Chinese state education remains locked into a means-to-an-end system, despite efforts made in the recent education reforms. Even if the terms such as ‘all-around development of students’ are encouraged in the educational discourses, it remains a system ‘oriented’ towards state requirements. My suggestion for policy-makers and educational practitioners is to examine the terms ‘well-roundedness’ and

‘creativity’ at their philosophical level, to bring more holistic practices into the education system and to treat students as ‘ends-in-themselves’. It is crucial for the health of children that they are treated with respect in order to develop their inherent potential. This will create space for the organic unfolding of creative individuals, who, in turn, will benefit society at large and help the future maintenance of harmonious life on earth.

As I have discussed, China is still undergoing its process of modernisation and the emergence of a recognisable middle-class is still a relatively recent phenomenon. In many ways the aspirations, beliefs and values of this new middle-class will go a long way in writing the next twists and turns of Chinese history. The Steiner education movement, which has emerged since 2004 broadly as a middle-class movement, has the potential to significantly shape the future generations of Chinese thinkers as these students grow up and take their place in Chinese society.

Lastly, I suggest that it is of vital significance for the Chinese education system to reconnect with its ‘Chinese roots’, to rediscover and re-embrace the timeless wisdom of its own philosophical tradition, which will, in turn, inform its educational practices.

What hope is there for Steiner education in China and for our world? The hope lies in the memory and the *essence* of Steiner education finding new articulations and voices. The hope lies in the idea that Steiner education finds fertile soil in a country such as China which has been largely secularised and has such a powerful authoritarian regime. The hope for Steiner education lies not with the notion that Steiner schools may simply keep appearing, for as we know, there are many historical institutions which become disembedded from their root concerns. The hope lies rather with the idea that contained within the human condition there is a need, a hunger and a thirst for the individual to be recognised and treated as a spiritual and holistic being. As long as there are individuals that remain yearning for these values and consciously striving for them, something of Steiner’s spirit will always persist. Steiner himself was not setting out to construct a cultish devotion to his pedagogical methods, rather it was a particularly brilliant experiment conducted under extreme limitations which flourished against the odds. The same winds that fanned the original flames of Steiner education exist today and they help give life to every emancipatory project which seeks to develop the human soul or spirit in accordance with the harmony found in the natural world.

12.3.2 Directions for further research

I consider this thesis to be a living document and a launch point for further studies and discussions. Indeed, I have not exhausted the rich intellectual avenues opened up within participants' accounts, nor the theoretical perspectives I could work with to contextualise the findings. There are several recommendations for future researchers.

The first recommendation for future studies is to investigate and compare more Steiner schools in China, especially those in rural areas and those that have recently been founded. In this way, potentially meaningful comparisons can be made with the findings of the current study. It would also generate insight if comparative studies at Steiner schools in mainland China and Taiwan were conducted, considering the cultural parallels between Taiwan and mainland China yet their different political and educational contexts.

In the current research, I made a decision to opt out of investigating students' perspectives. There is, however, a distinct lack of empirical studies researching students' perspectives and voices at the Steiner schools in China. Thus the second recommendation is to empirically examine students' perspectives at the Chinese Steiner schools. In addition, it would be useful to investigate the outcomes of the Steiner education implemented in China, for example, the jobs and work opportunities the children ultimately took up, their values and psychological wellbeing. It would be helpful to provide Chinese parents and educators with a clear picture of how Steiner education might help children in their schooling.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct comparative studies on Steiner education and other alternative models, such as Montessori and *guoxue* schools in China. Investigations could examine practices, choice, perceptions and experiences of teachers, parents and students.

The fourth suggestion is to investigate and compare Steiner schools in China with those in other countries, especially in the countries where Steiner education was introduced much earlier and has become more established, such as the UK, the USA, Germany and Australia. The comparative studies would be helpful in terms of finding out how the educational practices and experiences of students, parents and teachers are different in relation to the differences in the cultural and educational contexts.

Lastly, as has been noted, the founding of most Steiner schools in China was driven by what is widely referred to among the Steiner communities in China as 'the grass-roots mothers' self-help movement'. A significant factor to note is that for many of the mothers I interviewed, their involvement in Steiner schools had proved to be an empowering experience (see Section 8.2 and Section 9.1). Mothers still take prime responsibility for children's schooling and education in today's China (Sheng, 2015). I have attempted where necessary to acknowledge the special role Chinese mothers take in the management of their child's education. I have, however, chosen not to adopt a gender lens in my study. The main reason is that I feel it was not an issue that was strongly reflected in my data and therefore would have required a larger degree of speculative analysis than the other topics I have chosen to concentrate on. Issues surrounding gender are extremely complex and require a degree of cultural translation between European and Chinese understandings. With this in mind I felt it would be intellectually discourteous to reflect upon gender issues only partially. This may provide an additional research story for later exploration.

12.4 Researcher Reflections on the PhD Journey

Doing a PhD is a pilgrimage. Embarking on the journey, I knew little about what I needed in order to accomplish this PhD and contribute to the fields. I have journeyed through unknown waters and weathered storms, with phases of passion for learning and making progress and phases of self-doubt: 'Maybe I really just know nothing'. At times, this journey felt like travelling through a tunnel of complete darkness without seeing a trace of light; sometimes it felt like opening up to an overwhelming number of paths and I had no idea which one to take.

This PhD journey was also part of my bigger search for what it means to be *alive*. Time has passed so swiftly: I still vividly remember the autumn of 2013 at a permaculture farm by the side of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala when I was writing my application to the Master's programme at Cambridge University. Ten months prior to that, while working at a leading investment bank in Singapore, I could not escape the feeling of profound emptiness. It was not an easy decision to leave, yet I longed deeply for other roads in life that would be more meaningful to walk upon. I ended up travelling, living on the road for 20 months, before I arrived in Cambridge and started my Master's in psychology and education. It was during

this time I encountered Steiner education.

The shift from the field of mathematics (and economics) to education, from working with numbers and charts to engaging with words and people, from writing in Mandarin to writing in English, was much more challenging than I had imagined. I was intimidated by the ‘academic standards’ at such a prestigious university and frequently struggled to find my scholarly, critical voice. Yet I enjoyed and grew in the midst of these ups and downs, and I genuinely loved my 10 months of fieldwork, talking to Steiner parents and teachers whilst living with the Steiner communities in China. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Ruth Kershner for allowing me space to explore and encouraging me to write with confidence and authenticity. I am also grateful that after four years, this PhD project became such an inseparable part of my life, which I am still in love with.

I had numerous conversations with psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists, trying to figure out a field for my research. I started this research planning to use the psychological theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and attempted to use social theories and feminist theories to explain the phenomenon in the middle of my PhD. In the end, however, I was convinced this phenomenon had to be researched beyond disciplines. I went through a similar journey to discover my paradigmatic position, which was outside any of the dominant Western paradigms.

Meanwhile, I embraced aspects of holistic education as part of my daily life, including mindfulness practices as well as using aspects of Goethean observation whenever I was engaging with living beings (see Appendix 13 for my reflections on a meditation practice). My own growth also led me to design and facilitate workshops on holistic education, mindfulness and connection with nature with hundreds of young adults among my own communities in China. Together we sought the *essence* in each one of us and the meaning in life, which we might create. I am deeply humbled by, and grateful for, all the roads I have walked and people I have met prior to, and during, this PhD journey, which have all mysteriously led me to where I am. I do not have a trace of doubt, that the completion of this PhD is not the end of a journey, rather the start of another pilgrimage in my life.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Six Major Theories or Worldviews Underpinning Holistic Education

Theory (or Worldview)	Explanation
Perennial philosophy	Perennial philosophy is an ancient philosophy that has guided the works of John Miller (e.g. <i>The Holistic Curriculum</i>) and Palmer (e.g. <i>To Know as We are Known; The Courage to Teach</i>) and many others in the field of contemporary holistic education. This philosophy is "primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things, and lives and minds" (Huxley, 1945, p.2). The main themes of perennial philosophy that have been incorporated by holistic education are: divine reality, oneness, wholeness, and multiple dimensions of reality.
Indigenous worldviews	Indigenous worldviews have primarily influenced the works of two contemporary holistic educators, Kessler (e.g. <i>The Soul of Education</i>) and Gajete (e.g. <i>Look to the Mountain</i>). The major ideas that have been built into the theories and practices of holistic education are: reverence for nature, the earth, the universe, and the Spirit; the interconnectedness and sacredness of reality; and human beings' reintegration with nature.
Life philosophy	Ron Miller and Atsuhiko Yoshida are two scholars who have positioned the concept of 'Life' at the core of their theories of holistic education. "Life philosophy assumes that there exists a fundamental Life force, or a universal Life process", and this Life force "generates and organizes all beings in the cosmos" (Nakagawa, 2000, p.78, 79). Life philosophy assumes "that our lives have a purpose, a direction, a meaning, and a goal that transcends our personal egos and particular physical and cultural conditioning" (Ron Miller, 1991, p.79). Contemporary holistic educators who endorse this concept of 'Life' usually conceive education as a "manifestation of Life and at the same time a vehicle in the service of reconnecting human life with the fundamental Life" (Nakagawa, 2000, p.78, 79).
Ecological worldview	The ecological worldview has been one of the most influential orientations to contemporary holistic education. The ecological worldview, often associated with deep ecology (e.g. Naess's <i>Ecology, Community and Lifestyle</i> and Capra's <i>The Web of Life</i>), "focuses on the principle of interconnectedness of all beings in nature, life

	and the universe [...] a living phenomenon is understood only in relation to other phenomena and in larger ecosystems" (Nakagawa, 2000, p.80). Ecological thinking assumes that everything is interdependent and all life forms are part of the same web of life (ecosystem). The ecological worldview is often addressed in holistic education through 'ecological literacy', in which topics such as environmental issues, dialogues with nature, the interdependence of reality, and sustainability are explored.
Systems theory	Systems theory is "a theoretical attempt to explore comprehensive, cosmological models of the cosmic world" (Nakagawa, 2000, p.84). Systems theory generally "assumes several major subsystems within the entire universe such as the inanimate physical realm, primordial life forms, the biological realm of plants and animals, the mental field (symbolic and linguistic systems) produced by the human mind, and sociocultural systems. " (Nakagawa, 2000, p.84). Systems theory also recognizes the interdependence of all things, but its exploration of the subject is based on systemic explanations of the dynamic structure of the universe, or the cosmic world (Nakagawa, 2000). This systemic worldview is present in the 'holistic theory' of Ron Miller (2000b), in the 'integrated curriculum' of Clark (2001) and many others in the field of holistic education.
Feminist thought	Feminist thought is represented by Noddings and Eisler in the field of holistic education. The most relevant work by Noddings to holistic education has dealt with her ideas on caring relations (e.g. <i>A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education</i> and <i>To Challenge to Care in Schools</i>). Noddings has proposed a caring-centred education that calls for the cultivation of relations of care in school, which includes caring for the self, for the inner circle, for distant others, for animals, plants and the earth, for the human-made world, and for the world of ideas (Noddings, 1983). Eisler focuses more on the egalitarian aspects of relationships, and has designed a model of education - 'partnership education' (e.g. <i>Tomorrow's Children</i>). Eisler's 'partnership model of education' includes themes such as democratic and egalitarian structure; equal rights for females and males; respect; peaceful conflict resolution; empathy; caring; non-violence; mutual responsibility; and connections to the earth.

Appendix 2 Sample Pages from the Research Diary on Initial Visits to Steiner Schools in China

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1.1.3 XXX Steiner School

I paid a visit to XXX Steiner School on 31 December 2015. This Steiner school is located in the outskirts of Beijing city, in the countryside among hills. It's one of the largest Steiner



schools in the country. The school is at a bio-dynamic farm centre and calls itself a utopia in Beijing. This school was founded about five years ago, and now consists of a kindergarten and a lower school from Year 1 to Year 5.

The founder invited me to attend their Steiner teacher training course for that day. He himself was the trainer who trained Steiner teachers. He shared with us ancient Chinese stories that he used in class with children. In a way, the curriculum of this Steiner school has been largely developed by him. Interestingly, the curriculum in each Steiner school that I visited was developed by its own teaching staff, and they varied greatly from each other. I also heard that each Steiner school has its own Steiner teacher training and prepares its own Steiner teachers.





Request For Administrative Consent to Conduct Research at Your School, Pertaining to an In-Depth Study on Steiner (Waldorf) Education in China

To XX Steiner School,

I should be grateful if your school would participate in a research project I am currently undertaking as part of the requirements for the completion of a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education, at the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge, UK, under the supervision of Ruth Kershner.

The purpose of this study is to explore the ‘Steiner Fever’ phenomenon, which refers to the rapid growth of Steiner (Waldorf) education in China in the past decade. The current study can be considered as one of the first empirical studies on Steiner education in China. It will greatly deepen understanding of the rapid growth of Steiner education in China, as well as furthering knowledge on Chinese alternative education. This research is funded by the China Scholarship Council (CSC), affiliated with the Ministry of Education in China.

I am personally very keen on studying more about Steiner education. I got to know about Steiner education three years ago during my travels; since then I have become very interested in its philosophies and pedagogies. Alongside my PhD research, I have also been undertaking a 2-year part-time Steiner teacher training course in England and have completed 15 months of training so far.

As the researcher, I have chosen two Steiner schools in China, including your school, as

research sites for conducting my ethnographic fieldwork. And I hope to spend approximately four months at each site. I would like to seek your permission to come to your school to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork between XXX 2017 and XXX 2017 and I hope to reside in the neighbourhood of the school.

Data Generation Process:

This ethnographic study will involve one-to-one interviews with approximately 25 parents and staff from your school, participant observations (both in and outside classrooms), unstructured informal conversations and document analysis (e.g. school newsletters, school website). As such, during the fieldwork, I would like to invite around 25 parents and school staff from the school for personal interviews with me. Each interview will take about 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. The questions in the interview will be about how the participants got involved with Steiner education and the phenomenon of ‘Steiner Fever’ in general. At the beginning of each session, the participants will be asked to complete a consent form. They are free to withdraw at any point during the fieldwork period (XXX to XXX 2017) without any consequences.

With regard to the classroom observations, I should be grateful if arrangements could be made for me to observe classes in both the kindergarten and the school (for about four and a half hours in total on a weekly basis, but varying from week to week), during my time in the field. I will come into the class as a researcher, and will not participate in classrooms unless invited by the class teacher or if help is needed. I will not videotape or audiotape the class, but I will take notes at the time. In addition, I would like to take photos around the school during my fieldwork, and in classrooms if the teacher in the classroom gives me permission. However, without permission from your school, no photos with the faces of people will be published in order to protect the confidentiality of the school and its participants.

Confidentiality

All the data generated in the field (e.g. interviews, observations) will be analysed and reported confidentially in terms of individuals. I may analyse the data collected in the field (e.g. the interviews, observations) in the context of your school, and I may use broad descriptions to describe your school in terms of size (large, moderately large or small),

‘maturity’ (long or short time since founding), location (whether it is rural or inner city) and age range of students. I will not indicate the name of your school in my report. However, since there are only a few Steiner schools in Beijing, there is a chance your school could be identified by the audience. With regard to research participants, there will not be any information that will reveal specific information about them.

In addition to reporting this study in the form of my PhD thesis, the results may be presented at conferences or published in international journals. I will not provide you with the research results for your school in order to protect the confidentiality. However, I would like to send you the overall findings of this research with regard to 'Steiner Fever' in China. Accordingly, a final report will be sent to the school before or after publication.

Research data will be password-protected on my personal laptop. Material will only be shared with people involved in working with me on the research project.

Risk

This research has received ethical approval from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Cambridge. It is an academic research study and is not associated with any media. In addition, this research is not an assessment or examination of the school. Rather the focus is on the exploration of ‘Steiner Fever’, and the interpretation and practices of Steiner education in the Chinese context (see enclosed sample interview tool).

I hope that this research will benefit the Chinese Steiner communities in general by providing more insight into Steiner education in China. Please complete the attached consent form and mail it to me if your school agrees to participate.

Thank you for your support and cooperation in this endeavour. If you have any questions about this research, please contact me (ys425@cam.ac.uk). If you have any queries about your rights as a participating organisation in the study, contact the University of Cambridge Research Ethics Committee at cshssethics@admin.cam.ac.uk or by phone: 01223 766238.

Best Wishes,

Yifan Sun
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
University of Cambridge
ys425@cam.ac.uk

Supervisor: Ruth Kershner
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Education
University of Cambridge
rsk21@cam.ac.uk

Consent Form

Please check the boxes below:

- I have received clear information about this study. ☐
- I have the opportunity to ask about any unclear information. ☐
- I understand that interviews may be voice-recorded. ☐
- I understand that class observations will be conducted and the some photos will be taken at the school and in the classroom. ☐
- I understand what this study involves and agree to participate in this research and accommodate Yifan Sun as a researcher at the school site during the period of XXX 2017 and XXX 2017. ☐

Authority's Printed Name

Authority's Signature

Date



在贵校开展深入研究华德福（华德福）教育在中国的行政同意请求

尊敬的 XX 华德福学校：

我在此诚挚邀请贵校参与并协助我正在进行的调查研究项目。本研究项目是我在英国剑桥大学教育学院的教育学博士项目，由 Ruth Kershner 老师进行督导。

该项目意在探析近十年来华德福教育在中国迅速发展的‘华德福热潮(Steiner Fever)’现象，可被视为最早关于华德福教育在中国的实证研究之一。它将帮助深入理解华德福教育在中国的迅速发展，以及进一步探析中国的教育选择问题。本研究由中国国家公派留学基金管理委员会全额资助。

我个人对华德福教非常热衷。在三年前的旅行中，我开始接触到华德福教育，并从那以后对华德福教育与哲学理念产生了浓厚的兴趣。在博士期间，我还在英国参与为期两年的华德福教师培训课程（兼职），目前已经完成了 15 个月的培训。

作为本研究的研究者，我选择了包括贵校在内的两所中国的华德福学校作为我的田野调查的研究地点，并将在每个学校开展为期四个多月的调研。现希望能征求贵校的同意于 2017 年 X 月 X 日至 2017 年 X 月 X 日在贵校中开展田野调查，并能够住在学校附近。

数据生成过程

本研究将包括与 25 名学生家长及学校员工的一对一访谈、参与式观察（课堂内外兼有）、非正式谈话以及文献分析（如：校刊、学校官网）等调查方法。在实地调查过程中，我将邀请大约 25 名学生家长和学校员工与我进行一对一的访谈。每个访谈时长约为 1 小时并进行录音，问题大致关于受访者如何参与华德福教育及‘华德福热潮’的现象。在每个访谈开始前，受访者将被要求填写知情同意书，并且可以在实地调查期间（2017 年 X 月至 2017 年 X 月）的任意情况下，无需承担任何责任地退出参与调查。

关于课堂观察，我希望在调研期间，贵校能帮助我安排在幼儿园及学校进行观察（每周大约四至四个半小时的观察时间，但根据每周情况有所变化）。我将以研究者的身份进入课堂，除非在受到老师邀请或需要帮助时，否则我并不会参与到课堂活动中。在课堂观察过程中，我将会以笔记的形式记录观察内容，并不会录音及录像。此外，我希望能在调研期间对学校进行拍照，并在获得老师允许的情况下对教室内部进行拍照。为了保护校方及师生的隐私，在未经贵校允许的情况下，带有人脸的照片将不会被发表。

保密性

实地调查（如：访谈、观察）过程中产生的所有数据将被谨慎且保密地进行分析及汇报。在分析通过实地调查（如：访谈、观察）而获得的贵校的数据时，我将采用概括化的描述方法来描述贵校的规模（大的、中等的或小的），‘成熟度’（建立已久的或新建的）、位置（郊区或市区）以及学生的年龄段，且在分析报告中不会提及贵校的名称。然而，由于北京地区的华德福学校数量并不多，贵校仍有可能被读者辨认出；但是具体参与者的个人信息将不会被透露出来。

此外，本研究除了会以博士论文的形式呈现，其研究成果可能还将在国际会议中被使用，或在国际期刊上发表。为了维护参与者的隐私，我不能为贵校提供单独的在贵校获得的研究结果；但我会将本研究——中国“华德福热潮”——的总体研究结果提供给贵校。此外，最终研究报告会在被发表前或被发表后提供给贵校。

最后，研究数据将会以加密文档的形式保存在我的个人电脑中，仅会被参与本研究的相关人员获取。

风险

本研究已获得英国剑桥大学教育伦理委员会的批准，将仅用于学术研究，不会涉及任何媒体报道，也不会涉及对学校的任何评估或检测。研究目的主要在于探寻中国“华德福热潮”的现象整体以及剖析华德福教育在中国的完成情况。

本研究希望提供关于中国华德福教育更深入的理解，以促进中国华德福社区的总体发展。如贵校同意参与本研究调查，请填写附件的知情同意书并邮件回传给我，谢谢！

诚挚感谢贵校的支持与配合。如果贵校对本研究有更多的疑问，请通过邮件联系我：ys425@cam.ac.uk。如果贵校对于作为参加本研究的权利与权益有更多问题，也可邮件联系英国剑桥大学研究伦理委员会：cshssethics@admin.cam.ac.uk 或电话至：0044 1223 766238。

孙一帆
英国剑桥大学教育学院
博士研究生
ys425@cam.ac.uk

导师：Ruth Kershner
英国剑桥大学教育学院
资深讲师
rsk21@cam.ac.uk

知情同意书

请确认后在方框中打勾：

- 我已经清楚地了解本研究的相关信息 ☐
- 我明白如有任何不清楚的信息，可以询问研究者 ☐
- 我明白访谈过程中有可能会被录音 ☐
- 我明白研究者会进行课堂观察，且会拍摄教室或校园的照片 ☐
- 我明白本研究所涉及的内容，并同意孙一帆在 2017 年 X 月至 2017 年 X 月期间以研究者的身份住在学校附近 ☐

学校负责人姓名

学校负责人签名

日期



Participant Information and Consent Form (Interview)

You are invited to take part in a doctoral research project on Steiner education in China. In this project, you will be invited for a personal interview about how you got involved with Steiner education and your views on Steiner education in general. This interview will take about one hour. The interviews may be voice-recorded or written down.

Any information or personal details gathered during the research will be kept confidential. The data collected from this project will be saved in a password-protected file, which can only be accessed by myself, my supervisor and people who are involved in this research. All data are totally anonymous. Your school may be given the opportunity to see the overall findings from this study, but they will not be able to identify you. The results may be presented in conferences or published in international journals, but there will not be any information that reveals participants' personal data.

If you decide to participate, you can withdraw from the research at any time between December 2016 and May 2017 without any consequences and without having to give a reason.

This project has received ethical approval from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Cambridge. If you have any further questions about the study or if you wish to know about the results of the study, feel free to contact me via email: ys425@cam.ac.uk.

Yifan Sun

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education

University of Cambridge

ys425@cam.ac.uk

Consent Form

Please check the boxes below:

I have received clear information about this study.

☐

I have the opportunity to ask about any unclear information.

☐

I understand the interview may be voice-recorded.

☐

I acknowledge the right to withdraw from this research at any time between December 2016 and May 2017. However, the data generated before my withdrawal will still remain valid for further use.

☐

Do you agree to take part in this study? YES NO (please circle)

Participant's Name (Block letters) _____

What is your parental role, if any? (e.g. father, mother, carer, grandmother) And what is your role at school (e.g. teacher, administrator), if any?

Email address (if you would like to be contacted)

Participant's signature _____

Date _____



访谈知情同意书

我在此诚挚邀请您参与这个关于中国华德福教育的剑桥大学教育学博士研究项目。在此项目中，你将被邀请参加个人访谈，其内容将围绕您是如何参与华德福教育的以及您对华德福教育的大致看法。此访谈时长约为一个小时，访谈内容可能会被录音或文字记录。

本研究过程中收集的所有数据和个人信息都会被加密保存且保密，仅供我本人、我的导师以及参与本研究的相关人员获取。所有的数据均采用匿名的方式处理，您所在的学校有可能会看到本研究的总体研究成果，但是并不能辨别出您的个人信息。本研究结果还可能在会议中被使用或在国际期刊上发表，但并不会泄露参与者的任何个人信息。

参与此项目的过程中，您可以在 2016 年 12 月至 2017 年 5 月期间的任何情况下无需承担任何责任地退出参与调查。

本项目已获得英国剑桥大学教育伦理委员会的批准。如果您对本研究有任何问题，或是想了解本研究的研究结果，请随时通过电子邮件联系我：ys425@cam.ac.uk。

孙一帆

英国剑桥大学教育学院

博士研究生

ys425@cam.ac.uk

同意书

请谨慎检阅以下内容：

- 我已经接收到关于这个研究的清楚信息。 ☐
- 我明白我有机会去询问任何我不清楚的信息。 ☐
- 我明白本次访谈可能会被录音。 ☐
- 我明白我有权利在 2016 年 12 月到 2017 年 5 月的任何时间内退出本次研究。
然而在我退出之前所已经生成的数据将仍有效，可供研究者使用。 ☐

请问您愿意参加本次研究吗？ 同意 不同意（请圈出答案）

参与者姓名： _____

请问您的家庭角色是什么？（例如：父亲、母亲、护理人，祖母），且请问您在学校的
职位是什么？（例如：老师、管理者）

请填写您的电子邮箱地址（假如您愿意保持联络）：

参与者签名： _____

日期： _____



Participant Debrief Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in this study. The interview you have attended will allow me to investigate the social phenomenon of ‘Steiner Fever’, which refers to the rapid growth of Steiner education in China, as part of my doctoral research at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

I hope you enjoyed taking part in this study. If you have any further questions about the study or if you wish to know about the results of the study, feel free to contact me via email: ys425@cam.ac.uk.

Thank you,

Yifan Sun

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education

University of Cambridge

ys425@cam.ac.uk



情况汇报表

尊敬的受访者：

感谢您在百忙之中抽空参与本次调查。您参加的个人访谈将帮助我研究调查“华德福热潮”——华德福教育在中国的迅速发展——这一社会现象，以作为我在英国剑桥大学教育学院的博士研究项目内容。

我希望您对本次调查感到满意。如过您对本研究有任何问题，或是想了解本研究的研究结果，请随时通过电子邮件联系我：ys425@cam.ac.uk。

孙一帆

英国剑桥大学教育学院

博士研究生

ys425@cam.ac.uk

手工课 1.18. 周三. [redacted] 在手工教室.
 用一学期的时间 本学期最后一堂手工课
 娃娃制作 → 测量娃娃头围, 颈围, 胸围, 等.
 → 设计. 设计图. (包括头发)
 → 纸模型. (纸样).
 * 她可以完全压得住课堂.
 大多数学生也非常有兴趣.
 → 选布料. 配色, 布料质地. 经纬线. 棉麻丝.
 → 缝制, 包边. 扣子, 拉链.
 有自己的手工课工作记录与设计.
 个人工作总结在手工课本上. (10min)
 → 小组工作. 制作海报. 张贴出来 (25min)
 * [redacted] 真得适合作手工老师, 真得有热情!
 1.18 周三. 下午 采访家长 [redacted] “道家”文化的体现
 * 非常有经验的家长, 很多年前追随小巫, 学习蒙氏 → 华德福.
 * 她非常喜欢看幼儿教育书, 也非常有思想, 洞见.
 她将为我列出一个单子 (家长名单). 春节之后可以慢慢采访, 15个家长左右.
 * 在别人眼中的“疯人院”. — 北京市教委推广大自然教育, “研学”(游学)
 1.18. 3:30pm 四年级 party
 * 这样小年龄的孩子们就能自行组织 party, 还能做果汁, 蛋糕,
 很让我震撼! 还很懂得谦让. 自己清扫.
 * [redacted] 老师看起来亲切可爱. 却也特能hold住场与静下来.
 * 他们还家长做饭请家长来, 还自己清扫. [与英语老师 informal conv.]

Appendix 7a Interview Schedule (with School Staff and Parents) [in English]

Date:

Time:

Duration:

Location:

Name (Alias):

Beginning: Briefing on the research and issues concerning confidentiality, including participants' rights not to answer certain questions.

1. Demographics

- ✧ Role at the school (parent, teacher etc.).
- ✧ Personal background (age, place of origin, profession etc.).
- ✧ Family background and history.
- ✧ Children (number of children he/she has, how old are they, whether go to a Steiner school, which Steiner school, how many years in the Steiner school).

2. Previous Educational (and Professional/Life) Experience

- ✧ What was your own educational experience like? Did you enjoy it?
- ✧ Is the experience related to the reason you are involved with Steiner education?
- ✧ What was your own professional/life experience like?

3. Decision to Opt for Steiner Education (Personal, and/or for Children)

- ✧ How did you hear about Steiner education (Steiner schools)?
- ✧ How was the decision made to get involved (as parent/staff)?
- ✧ Why did you choose to get involved with Steiner education (as parent/staff)?
- ✧ Who in the family was involved in this decision?
- ✧ Have you considered other forms of education (Montessori, home schooling, international schools etc.)?

4. Experience of Steiner Education

- ✧ What is your experience of Steiner education so far?
- ✧ If your child is in the Steiner kindergarten/school, how about his/her experience? (Is she/he happy at the school? What is his/her opinion about the experience?)
- ✧ Has your child attended other schools/kindergartens before coming to Steiner education? (What was that experience like? Any major changes after coming to Steiner education?)
- ✧ Do you have any concerns about Steiner education?

5. Views and Beliefs on Education

- ✧ What do you think a good education is?
- ✧ What do you think about other forms of education, such as mainstream schools, Montessori, home schooling? (In terms of philosophy and values, curriculum, pedagogy, parental involvement etc.).
- ✧ Is your involvement with Steiner education as an alternative schooling model related to dissatisfaction with the mainstream schools?
- ✧ How would you portray your future? Your child's future? (e.g. lifestyle, career, personal qualities etc.). Can Steiner education help with that, and how?

6. Views and Understanding of Steiner Education

- ✧ Do you know much about Steiner education?
- ✧ What do you understand/think about it?
- ✧ How about *anthroposophy*?
- ✧ Do you think the practice of Steiner education is the same/different in other countries? How?
- ✧ Is Steiner education related to Chinese culture/traditions/values, and how?

7. About Other People who are Involved and Steiner Fever

- ✧ How do other people get involved with Steiner education, if you know any?
- ✧ Is there a typical profile for people who get involved in Steiner education? If so, what is it?
- ✧ Do you think there is a 'Steiner Fever' in China, and why?
- ✧ If so, what is causing this 'Steiner Fever'? Why in China? Why now?

8. Others and Closing

- ✧ Do you have other stories, reflections and comments that you would like to share with me?
- ✧ Summarise the main points we talked about during the interview .
- ✧ Do you have any other comments?

Thank you very much for your participation. If I am allowed, I may contact you for further questions or clarification. If you have any questions, please contact me via email.

学校教职员及学生家长访谈表

日期:

时间:

时长:

地点:

姓名（化名）:

开始阶段：简述本研究及隐私保密问题（包括受访者有权不回答某些问题）

1. 基本情况

- ✧ 在学校的角色（学生家长、教师等）
- ✧ 个人背景信息（年龄、出生地、职业等）
- ✧ 家庭背景及经历
- ✧ 子女相关信息（子女数量、子女年龄、是否会选择华德福学校、就读于哪一所华德福学校、在华德福学校学习了几年）

2. 教育（以及职业/人生）经历

- ✧ 您个人的教育经历是怎么样的？您是否享受该经历？
- ✧ 您的职业/人生经历是怎么样的？
- ✧ 您的早期经历是否与你选择华德福教育有关？

3. 对华德福教育的选择（个人原因或孩子原因）

- ✧ 您是通过什么途径了解到华德福教育（或华德福学校）的？
- ✧ 您是出于什么原因，并如何加入到华德福教育之中呢（作为学生家长或教职员）？
- ✧ 家庭中是否还有其他成员参与作这一决定？

- ✧ 您是否考虑过其他形式的教育（如蒙特梭利、家庭教育、国际学校等）

4. 华德福教育体验

- ✧ 目前来说，您的华德福教育体验如何？
- ✧ 如果您的孩子就读于华德福幼儿园/学校，他/她的体验如何？（在学校是否开心？他/她对于这一体验有什么看法？）
- ✧ 您的孩子接受华德福教育前是否参加过其他的学校/幼儿园？（当时的体验如何？在接受华德福教育后有什么重大的改变吗？）
- ✧ 您对于华德福教育有什么疑问吗？

5. 教育观

- ✧ 您认为好的教育是什么样的？
- ✧ 您对于其他形式的教育（如主流教育，蒙特梭利、家庭教育）持有何种观点（就哲学及价值观、课程内容、教育方法、家长参与等方面而言）？
- ✧ 您是因为对主流教育不满而将华德福教育作为替代么？
- ✧ 您对于您的未来、您孩子的未来有什么期待呢（如：生活方式、职业规划、个人品质等）？华德福教育是否有助于实现这些期待？它将如何能帮助其实现？

6. 对华德福教育的观点及理解

- ✧ 您对华德福教育有多少了解？
- ✧ 您是怎么理解华德福教育的？
- ✧ 您对于“人智学”的理解如何？
- ✧ 您认为其他国家的华德福教育实践是否与我国的华德福教育实践相同/不同？有哪些相同/不同之处？
- ✧ 华德福教育是否与中国的文化/传统/观念相关？如何相关？

7. 加入华德福热潮的其他人

- ✧ 您是否知道其他人如何加入到华德福教育中的？
- ✧ 您认为加入到华德福教育中的人是否有共同的典型特点？如果是，具体有哪些特点？

✧ 您认为中国是否存在华德福热潮？为什么在中国会有？为什么会出现现在现阶段？

8. 其他相关问题

✧ 您是否有其他经历、反馈或观点想要与我分享？

✧ 总结访谈中所涉及的重要内容

✧ 您是否还有其他的意见或建议？

非常感谢你的参与！如果可以，我可能会联系您做进一步的访谈或澄清。如您有任何问题，请通过邮件与我联系。

Appendix 8 Screenshot of Data Analysis Process Using NVivo

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for data analysis. The left sidebar shows a file explorer with folders like 'SOURCES', 'Internal', 'Fathers', 'Fieldnotes', 'Macro, Founders & Mentors', 'Mothers', 'Non-Steiner parents & Left', 'Staff (Female non-parent)', 'Staff (Male non-parent)', 'Staff & Fathers', and 'Staff & Mothers'. The top menu bar includes 'Home', 'Create', 'Data', 'Analyze', 'Query', 'Explore', 'Layout', and 'View'. The main text area contains a transcript of a conversation with various segments highlighted in different colors (purple, red, green). The coding density bar at the top shows segments like 'Other Education or School Choices', 'Mrs Zhou朋友对佛学、中医与华德福、人智学相通的看法', 'Steiner Education (Anthroposophy) vs. Traditional Chinese Culture', 'Mrs Zhou: 从数到道的层面, 作为一个老师和家长越发对华德福和人智学的理解', 'Gifted&问题孩子 Special Needs', 'Mrs Zhou: 学校管理的混沌&创建手工教室', 'Steiner Education in China vs. in Other Countries', 'Quotes', and 'Coding Density'.

Other Education or School Choices

Mrs Zhou朋友对佛学、中医与华德福、人智学相通的看法

Steiner Education (Anthroposophy) vs. Traditional Chinese Culture

Mrs Zhou: 从数到道的层面, 作为一个老师和家长越发对华德福和人智学的理解

Gifted&问题孩子 Special Needs

Mrs Zhou: 学校管理的混沌&创建手工教室

Steiner Education in China vs. in Other Countries

Quotes

Coding Density

度以后其实很多东西真的是通的, 我自己在学习人智学的时候, 我也发现, 其实跟中医真的是很像, 所以我不觉得有很大不同。

To give an example. I have a friend, who studies Buddhism quite deeply. His daughter is in the same kindergarten as my daughter. We two mums often chat. Sometimes after training/workshops, we share our thoughts, and have long conversations. Because she knows a lot about Buddhism, and is particularly a fan of Master Nan Huajin, and has read a lot on that, so whenever I mentioned something (related to *anthroposophy*) she immediately said, 'Oh that's the (similar concept) in Buddhism.'

Then I said, 'Oh actually all these have connections!' Then you really find when you study something deeply enough, they somehow all lead to a similar place. And when I myself studied *anthroposophy*, I also found it's so similar/connected to traditional Chinese medicine. It's not completely two different things.

采: 你是说人智医学和中医?

You mean anthroposophical medicine and traditional Chinese medicine?

被: 对, 人智医学和中医, 不会觉得有很大的。其实认知医学里面的有很多的专家、老师其实对咱们的中医挺感兴趣的。然后IPMT的时候也有很多儿科的西医来学, 同时也有很多中医来学。他们有专门有一个医师组, 那一组的都是这种背景的人。所以你看它这种东西到了对话层面的东西其实都是很高的了, 真的你一看术的时候觉得, 哎, 哦好像挺花哨的两不一样, 其实真正的拎到上面其实是差不多的, 相同的。

Yes. Anthroposophical medicine and traditional Chinese medicine, not too different. In fact, many experts and teachers in cognitive medicine are quite interested in our traditional Chinese medicine. Then during IPMT, there were paediatricians from Western medicine background who also came to study, together with some traditional Chinese doctors. They were grouped into the same medical group, which consisted of people who had a similar medical background. So you can tell that the level of conversation would be quite high, you thought on the surface/the technical level, they would be quite different things; in fact the more further into [the core], they are quite similar.

SOURCES > Internal > Staff & Mothers > A5. Mrs Zhou

Appendix 9 Themes and Codes Generated through Data Analysis

Topic	Theme	Nodes	Sources	References
Parents' and Teachers' Choice of Steiner Education	Other Education or School Choices		31	65
	Comparing Steiner Education with State Education		29	67
	<i>Push: Rejecting State Education</i>	Too much homework and pressure	18	20
		Whether (or not) to repeat the paths (of parents)	18	21
		Factual-knowledge-based and too one-dimensional	18	25
		Authoritarian, no respect for, and harmful to, children	15	21
		Test-driven, too much assessment and instrumentalisation	13	15
		Too early, no childhood or happiness	13	18
		Psychological well-being, physical and mental health	13	15
		Child's school refusal behaviour	12	16
		Being shaped, moulded and instrumentalised	7	6
		Problem children and children with special needs	6	8
		Too much competition	6	5
		Lack of spirituality and <i>jingshen</i>	5	9
		No love, communication or relationship (between students, teacher and parents)	5	8
		(Physical) punishment from teachers	5	7
		Too much ranking and stratification	5	6
		Money-driven and materialisation of education	5	6
		Excluded from state school	4	5
		Too much pressure on, and instrumentalising of, teachers	4	5
		No respect for art and music	3	7
	Why Not Choose Steiner Education?		4	5

	<i>Pull: Attracted by Steiner Education</i>	Becoming who one is, knowing oneself and natural growth	34	66
		Mental health, respect for children's nature (<i>benzhi</i>)	29	58
		Inspired by, aligned with, philosophy of Steiner education	24	32
		Lifestyle: close to nature, rural living and back to simplicity	23	37
		Child development	20	32
		Becoming holistic and balanced	20	27
		Happy childhood and allowing time to play	18	28
		Attitude to music, art and aesthetics	17	34
		Social responsibility and connection to society and world	16	28
		Child's preference or choice	16	27
		Child-centredness	15	24
		Parents' personal reasons: self-development and self-transformation	14	21
		Community: connection with others and community lifestyle	13	24
		Truth, kindness, beauty and warmth	13	23
		Spiritual education, spirituality (<i>jingshen</i>)	13	19
		Attracted by teachers (loving and caring)	13	19
		Parents' need for healing	9	14
		Children's love of learning	6	6
		Emphasis in experiential learning and skills with hands	5	6
		Non-elite and non-competitive	3	3
Path towards Steiner Education: Decision-making Process	The Path towards Steiner Education	First encounter with Steiner education (through friends and books, etc.)	44	55
		Changes in perceptions of Steiner education through experiential engagement	21	35
		Based on intuition and feelings	12	14
		In love with Steiner education through training and workshops	10	10
		Motherhood: learning how to educate a child	9	11
	Dealing with Opposition from Family	Attitudes of, and pressure from, family and friends	27	50
		(Dis)agreement with partner	19	28
	House Moving and Job Changing		21	34

Parents' and Teachers' Experience of Steiner Education	Life after Entering a Steiner School	Personal development and self-understanding	29	65
		Changes in children	28	61
		Education and training for parents	17	25
		Parental involvement at school	16	34
		Change in lifestyle: organic, breastfeeding, etc.	15	31
		Satisfied with Steiner education	11	13
		Parents and children on an educational path (an education for the whole family)	9	16
	Parental Dilemmas	Why leaving Steiner education?	27	77
		Grades, exams, ranking, factual knowledge, next-stage education	20	57
		Freedom vs. disciplines (homework, respect, etc.)	20	31
		Attitude towards science, technology, media and TV	17	33
		Anxiety and uncertainty about children's future	15	20
		Quality of teachers	15	22
		After-school tuition and in-advance studying	13	18
		Marginalisation, lack of connection with society and state education	12	24
		Insufficiency in mathematics and English language teaching	7	9
		Dogmatic about or worshipping Steiner education	3	3
		School without licence	2	3
Steiner Education in Relation to Traditional Chinese Values	Traditional Chinese Culture and Philosophies	Parallels between Steiner education (<i>anthroposophy</i>) and traditional Chinese culture	40	139
		Universalism and beyond the East and the West	27	58
		Revival of traditional Chinese culture and connecting to the roots	22	58
		Taoist values (being vs. doing, spirit and Qi)	13	28
	Illness of this Society and this Era	Materialism, modernisation and consumerism	23	37
		Loss of spirituality (<i>jingshen</i>)	14	18
		Westernisation	13	23
		Unbalanced mainstream society and life	8	11
	Understanding of the Goal of Education		29	59

	Significance of Steiner Movement in Chinese society		25	57
	Fever in Spirituality (and Chinese Medicine) and Spiritual Awakening		18	27
	Meaning of Life, Value and Mission	Spiritual education and body, soul and spirit	18	30
		Karma and destiny (<i>yuan</i>)	14	19
		Living a spiritual life and having spiritual practice	13	22
Contexts: Steiner Education in China	Practice of Steiner Education	Governmental policy and school licence	36	72
		Challenges in practising Steiner education at school	35	94
		Adapting Steiner education to the Chinese contexts	31	80
		Comparison between Steiner education in China and in other countries	31	70
		Steiner teacher training & requirements for teachers	30	66
		Developmental stages of the school	27	56
		Steiner theory vs. practice at schools	24	47
		Experimenting with new ways of teaching in classrooms	23	52
		Relationship of Steiner school to state education	13	21
		Development of Steiner education in China and its future	12	15
		Collaboration with other Steiner schools	11	14
	Self-help Educational Movement		37	59
	Historical Events: Opium Wars, One-child policy and May 4th Movement		9	11

Appendix 10 Transcription Convention

Behaviour/speech act	Description
Explanatory comments	When explanatory comments are added to a direct transcription, they are enclosed in brackets (e.g., 'I brought my daughter out of the [state] school')
Emphasis	Where a word or syllable is spoken with extra emphasis, it is capitalised (e.g., 'we could do ANYTHING')
Translation	When a word is emphasised in Chinese language, the Chinese word is written in italics and the English translation is enclosed in parentheses (e.g., 'Isn't this the same as Chinese Tao, the Taoism? <i>Tian, di, ren</i> (heaven, earth, human)')
Significant gestures/ behaviour	When a significant gesture or behaviour is conveyed, the description is provided in italics and enclosed in brackets (e.g., '[<i>Sighed</i>] All sorts of tuition, whatever you can imagine')
Omitted conversation	When transcripts have been shortened, this is indicated by a series of dots (e.g., 'not learning enough at school...')

Here I portray a main lesson that I observed in a classroom as an illustration of how such a lesson is typically conducted in a Chinese Steiner school. The following accounts are based on my field notes, taken when observing a lesson (Field notes, Dec 2016) of Class Four as well as the interview with the class teacher (Interview, A3) in the Beijing Steiner school. This will provide some glimpses of how a typical main lesson is conducted in the Beijing Steiner school.

Teachers were expected to arrive at school half an hour before the official start of the day for a brief staff meeting, although this seemed to me more like a mini ritual rather than a meeting. All the teachers stood in a circle in silence for a minute or so, and then together they recited a verse by Rudolf Steiner based on the day of a week. After that, a song would be sung by all, and someone might make some announcement or give news, before they were dismissed to go into their different classrooms.

Every morning at 8:00, the fourth-grade students at the Beijing Steiner school would line up in front of the classroom to shake hands with their class teacher³⁴, Mr Sun. It is one of the small daily rituals that Steiner education embraces. During the handshake, Mr Sun would greet the child by name and say 'Good morning', and might then spend a few seconds talking to him/her, sometimes with a few more encouraging words. As explained by the class teacher, by shaking the child's hand, he could meet the child's gaze and exchange salutations and also truly see the child in that moment. Through that brief handshake connection he could also roughly tell the child's physical and emotional state, whether the child was well, warm enough and whether the child might have something to share with him (Interview, A3).

The walls of the classroom were painted in green with the Waldorf *Lazure* painting method³⁵,

³⁴ As in most Steiner schools, the class teacher means the main teacher for a class who remains with the same class from the first to eighth grades, creating a tight bond between students and the class teacher and allowing for growth and a deepening sense of class community. However, as I have observed and read in the literature, this can make it hard for a newcomer or replacement teacher to take over a class.

³⁵ *Lazure* is a specific method of painting that consists of applying layers of thin paint to a white wall. The 'paint' itself is made up of water, binder and pigment. The result has a dreamy, ethereal quality.

which gave the place a light, dreamy feel. In the Steiner education system, colours, textures and materials in the classroom are often carefully chosen in order to provide children with a warm, beautiful, natural and not overly intellectualised environment³⁶. On a linen-covered bulletin board in Mr Sun's classroom were artworks by the students, traditional Chinese paper-cut. As in all Steiner classrooms (below Year 8), there were no computers, projectors or screens. Instead there was a large blackboard with two side panels hinged like a triptych, exactly the same ones that I have seen in the Steiner schools in England.

On the wall there was a giant portrait of Confucius. I was told that students here had a diverse curriculum, with a lot of traditional Chinese elements, for example, classics, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese opera, traditional Chinese music. It seemed to me this classroom was more traditional Chinese than any other Chinese state school I had visited. It was clearly a Steiner classroom, but adapted to a traditional Chinese style³⁷. The students in the classroom seemed to have got used to visitors observing their class. I sat quietly at the back of the classroom. Occasionally some would turn around and give me a curious look and giggle a little bit among themselves.

Each day started with a morning verse³⁸, which is usually a reiteration of a prayer written by Rudolf Steiner. Different grades usually have different verses³⁹. Teacher Mr Sun stood in front of the classroom, kept silence for a few seconds, and then signalled to all the children to stand up and recite out loud in Chinese with a sense of respect:

³⁶ One of Rudolf Steiner's indications was that the colour of the classroom resonates with the developmental stage of the children who spend their days there. The rooms basically follow the rainbow from the first through to the eighth grade. The first grade is painted a lovely rosy pink, which evolves to yellow in the third grade, green in the fourth grade, blue in the fifth grade. The colour gradually moves from blue towards lavender from the sixth through to the eighth grade.

³⁷ This was based on my previous fieldwork experience during my MPhil research and familiarity with Steiner schools in England.

³⁸ Rudolf Steiner instructed Waldorf teachers to disguise the nature of the morning verses. "I ask only one thing of you. You see, in such things everything depends upon the external appearances. Never call a verse, a prayer, call it an opening verse before school. Avoid allowing anyone to hear you, as a faculty member, using the word 'prayer'" (Steiner, 1998, p. 20).

³⁹ For example, students from Grades 5 to 8 will recite another verse in Chinese. Its English translation is: 'I look into the world/ In which the sun is shining/ In which the stars are sparkling/ Where stones in stillness lie/ Where living plants are growing/ Where animals live in feeling/ Where Man, within his soul gives dwelling to the spirit. I look into the soul that lives within my being/ The world creator weaves in sunlight and in soul-light./ To Thee, Creator Spirit, I turn my heart to ask/ That blessing and pure strength/ For learning and for work/ May ever grow within me.'

The Sun with loving light
Makes bright for me each day,
The soul with spirit power
Gives strength unto my limbs,
In sunlight shining clear I revere,
Oh God, the strength of humankind,
Which Thou so graciously
Has planted in my soul,
That I with all my might,
May love to work and learn.
From Thee stream light and strength
To Thee rise love and thanks.⁴⁰

Later I observed that almost all the collective activities at the school started with such a rite: each time a main lesson was initiated, each time a teacher meeting began, even at some organised school festivals (e.g. *Duanwu* Dragon Boat festival, based on field notes, May 2017).

This particular lesson was part of the Chinese literature and history block. The main subjects, such as history, language and mathematics were taught in blocks of two hours per day, with each block lasting from three to four weeks. Following the morning verse, Teacher Mr Sun pointed to a poem on the blackboard and led the children in reading it rhythmically. Following Mr Sun, the children copied his tone of voice word by word. The poem was written by a renowned poet, Changling Wang, from the Tang Dynasty, and translated as:

Army Life⁴¹

Clouds on frontier have darkened mountains clad in snow

⁴⁰ The verse presented here is in English, and the Chinese verse that was recited was:

太阳那爱的光/每天照耀我/心灵里精神的力量/使我肢体强健。/在澄明的阳光里/我崇敬你/哦，创造之神/ 你那人性的力量/ 精巧地植入我的心灵/ 我将用我所有的力量/ 热爱学习和工作/ 从你得到光明和力量/ 向你回应爱和感谢。

⁴¹ The original poem in Chinese is:

从军行 (唐：王昌龄)

青海长云暗雪山，孤城遥望玉门关。

黄沙百战穿金甲，不破楼兰终不还。

The town with gate of jade stands far away, forlorn
We will not leave the desert till we beat the foe
Although in war our golden armour be outworn

After that, Teacher Mr Sun opened the blackboard's folded wings to reveal a magnificent drawing in coloured chalk, which he had made of an octopus. He then carried on telling stories along with facts about the octopus. Later, he had the students open their main lesson books⁴² and draw an octopus of their choice, using coloured crayons, onto a new page.

After the main lesson, the children would eat snacks prepared by the school kitchen staff, having first recited one more verse, giving thanks to the sky, the earth and the farmers who had grown and harvested the food. Then came the 20-minute break time when most children went outside to play. This was followed by two 45-minute lessons: an English language lesson and a craftwork lesson, which for the fourth grade meant knitting. Later, they had lunch and in the afternoon, violin and Chinese calligraphy.

⁴² In Steiner schools, students create their own main lesson books instead of using an existing textbook. Usually the books include compositions and illustrations that the student creates from the lessons, such as botanical drawings, mathematical concepts and stories. It is considered to be a valuable learning tool that records the progress of the student through the grades.

Appendix 12 The First Interview

(As recorded from my field note dated Dec 2016)

The first was with a teacher at the school. At the beginning of the interview, I started with a friendly and genuine gesture, spent some time explaining to him about my research, the potential contribution and impact, hoping to build some rapport between us. I then went through the consent form and explained to him his rights with this research project. He somehow turned his head away slightly with some hesitation, 'Would it be OK if I decide after the interview whether or not to sign this consent form?' I was intrigued, but he did not want to explain further. I agreed and started the interview in awkwardness - I had never handled such a situation before!

He showed a great deal of reservation in responding to my questions during the interview. At the very end, as soon as I stopped recording, he took up a pen and signed the consent form. After a minute of silence, he turned towards me, 'I am fine with you using this data for your research. Sorry, at the beginning I didn't want to, as I wanted to be cautious. This school isn't licensed. Too much attention from the government doesn't do any good. Years back in my home town, I founded and ran my own Steiner kindergarten; it got inspected by the local government and ran into loads of trouble. Huge pain. I would never want to see this happen again.'

After this interview, I knew I had to make changes to my fieldwork plan for the first month. Instead of rushing into more formal interviews with staff and parents at this stage, I realised it was probably wiser and more ethical to build relationships with the people. Perhaps some sort of informal conversations could be a good enough starting point.

Practices such as meditation help dissolve the constructed realm, the social element in which the mind, consciousness and the ego all rest. What these practices allow for is the crossing of a ravine which separates the subjective and objective worlds. Just as those who have lost their sight develop heightened awareness among their other senses, so too, may one develop their general awareness of being, without cluttering and distorting our view of our cognitive minds. In a secularised society, in which we appear to lack any absolute authority, the outcome in the twentieth century has often been that of nihilistic destruction. Practices such as meditation offer the grounding of existence within what we might term a 'groundless ground'. That is to say, we may be able to develop our awareness so that we may be able to 'feel' truth rather than think it. We may be able to feel the dialectical harmony running through all things as described by the Tao. Such experiences offer an important counterpart to the nihilism one might experience in a life where any foundational meaning becomes stripped away. The simple power and beauty of notions such as holism or life as interconnection between all things partaking in a process of arising and passing away, or emerging and withdrawing, can be experienced by each and every individual, by quieting our minds and learning to 'listen' to the oneness that is our immanence with being.