

**A Comparative Study on the Parent-Child Interactive
styles of Middle-class Families between Hong Kong and
Denmark**

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Introduction

6-year-old Natalie rushed back home after her English tutorial class, with her immense desire to play with her new doll. Once she stepped into the big flat, her domestic worker, Gina's voice rang into her ears: Natalie, "go wash your hands and do homework immediately!" Natalie reacted with a face of dismay and tried to protest by saying: "I want to play first!" Gina answered with a prompt rejection: "No! Mom said you are not allowed to play until your homework is finished!" The discouraged Natalie groaned on the way to her room. She ended up spending about 3 hours to finish her large pile of homework assignments. Dinner time came instantly after that. Upon finishing her dinner, her mother, Mrs. Yu, urged her to do revision for the coming English dictation. Natalie was once again denied the chance to play.

5386 miles from the city where Natalie lived, 7-year-old Julie voluntarily did her homework once she came home after school. She spent approximately 1 hour to finish them. She then invited her friend Christine to come by and played with her in the garden for nearly 3 hours. Surrounded by ring of laughter and big smiles on their face, they played with Julie's dog, painted, and built houses with Legos together until dinner.

The above cases described the afterschool routine of two of my informants. The former case happened in Hong Kong while the latter one appeared in Denmark. You may ask: what exactly are the reasons behind the apparent differences?

In response to parents' urge to make their children excel, the rationalization of childhood has become a popular phenomenon, drawing worldwide attention to the practice of intensive rearing of kids.

Through exploring how Hong Kong and Denmark middle class parents and their children interact, I wish to understand more about their childrearing methods and

their motivations behind. In a larger context, I aspire to uncover the hidden ideologies behind the child-raising practices in the two societies. In my comparative project, I chose to investigate the middle class way of rearing children because the rationalization of childhood is most distinctly found among the middle class families. The comparison between Hong Kong and Denmark is intellectually justified as the former demonstrates the extreme situation of "Monster Parenting" (Qu 2010), with a large number of Hong Kong local parents spending so much effort in cultivating their kids since they were toddlers; whereas the latter deploys a seemingly opposite situation of allowing the "natural growth" of kids, simply letting them to do whatever they enjoy without much supervision or cultivation. Very few people have studied this significant difference in childrearing, yet I have vast interests in examining the invisible factors behind these seemingly distinct practices in the two different places under the same global context. I would like to find out whether these differences are cultural and social stereotypes. I absolutely believe there is considerable significance in learning about the different childrearing methods, as our family background very much shapes us who we are.

In my research project, I aim to answer the four research questions listed in the following:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the middle class interaction styles and childrearing practices in Hong Kong and Denmark?
2. Why are they similar and why are they different? What are the factors behind their similarities and differences?
3. What are the differences between what parents say and what they do?
4. How are their interaction styles and childrearing methods shaped by global capitalism?

Anthropologists have found literature as an effective way to shed light on childrearing practices. Reading relevant research literatures enriched my knowledge on what scholars have already found regarding my research topic, deepened my understanding on how social forces influence childrearing and shape parent-child interactions in different societies, as well as familiarized me with key issues and debates of the phenomenon. A review on the topic of competition, class, the comparative method and education context is included to familiarize readers with the research topic.

Competition

The dominance of competitions in nowadays' market capitalist societies exerts tremendous influence over parent-child interaction styles, as thoroughly illustrated in Kuan's "Love's Uncertainty", and succinctly demonstrated in Kusserow's "American Individualisms" as well as Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa's "Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited". Education for academic excellence, where fierce competitions prevail, has become a critical issue for parents. It shapes parental behavior and the ways of communication between parents and their kids.

Social competition has become very intense in both American and Chinese societies, shaping how parents raise their kids. According to Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa, the American society is built on competition where the Darwinian survival of the fittest model dictates (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:150). With regard to Kusserow, the soft individualism, which middle-class parents in Parkside try to cultivate into their children, is indeed strongly linked with "success, achievement, and leadership in a competitive society". The parents wish to achieve their goal of

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developing a successful career path for their children by ensuring their kids' competitiveness in the long run (Kusserow 2004:81).

Likewise, with reference to Kuan, the Chinese parents she interviewed fear competitions as they possess the power of elimination (Kuan 2015:70). Their anxiety lies in anything that would break their children's chance for success. Kuan's informants completely understand that their children have so much to compete for under market capitalism, ranging from "good grades, a good job, a good home" to "ultimately, life security" (Kuan 2015:158). In other words, in order to secure good life for their kids, parents would have to first take advantage of all possible opportunities to keep their children on the academic track. The contest among parents in raising outstanding kids heavily shapes the childrearing methods.

Intense competition in the education sector is explored by Kuan in "Love's Uncertainty". She demonstrates how the affective power of environment largely determines the way of parenting (Kuan 2015:136). In China, academic success is primarily measured by examination scores, which results in children's futures hinging upon how well they perform in the ultimate college entrance exam (Kuan 2015:54). The intense competition for limited places at Beijing's key-point universities thus imposes huge financial and psychological burden on families (Kuan 2015:106).

The middle-class parents experience conflicts in face of such competitive learning environment for their children. Aside from constantly worrying about their children being outcompeted in such a high-pressure education system, Kuan's informants also encounter difficulty in striking a delicate balance between two incommensurable goods: "protect the child's happiness or ensure survival" (Kuan 2015:86). On one hand, they have to respect their child as an autonomous being, on the other, they feel pressurized to gear their child for competing in the rigorous

education system (Kuan 2015:1).

In the face of the competitive education environment that overstresses academic achievement, enrolling children into best schools is one of the preliminary measures adopted by parents to ensure a good life for their kids, as depicted by both Kusserow and Kuan. With regards to Kusserow, "competition to get into private preschools were fierce" (Kusserow 2004:81) among the American middle class. Similarly, in Kuan's research in the Chinese context, parents' desire for their children to get into a reputable school is very strong, as it sets the stage for how well their kids are prepared for the gaokao (Kuan 2015:54) The common practice among Kunming parents to "school-select", meaning to scramble to enter better schools despite the enormous fees and far location that is outside one's assigned district, has led to the commercialization of education (Kuan 2015:162) and has further intensified competitions in the education system.

The middle-class parents have a strong tendency to develop their children through a variety of classes and activities, lest their kids be outcompeted (Kusserow 2004:82). This could be seen in the over-packing of children's learning schedules, with routinized activities taking precedence over their leisure time (Kuan 2015:111). This highly rationalized way of childrearing is again adopted to enhance children's competitiveness in the overwhelmingly cutthroat education environment. The importance, intensity and frequency of competitions in contextual education environment are aspects I was inspired to explore in my comparative research project.

The middle-class parents have dichotomous reactions towards the arbitrary education system, which is particularly demonstrated by Kuan's informants in the Chinese context: the parents either conform or resist the dominating education system (Kuan 2015:61). Some parents adamantly reject the competition regime in China

(Kuan 2015:171), but most of them choose to act in accordance with the tough demands of competition as they cannot see any alternative and have no luxury to opt for another path for their children. The popular saying of “You don’t want to lose at the starting line” delineates parents’ belief that “the hyper pursuit of education would confer life security over the long term” (Kuan 2015:209). Thus, parents try their very best to sharpen their children’s competitive edge by creating ‘*tiaojian*’, developing as many favorable conditions as possible for their kids (Kuan 2015:163).

Class

The notion of parenting differs according to social class is highlighted in both Kusserow's *American Individualisms* and Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*. Kusserow discovered that class differences exist in strategies for rearing and controlling children (Kusserow 2004:9). She unpacked the homogenous term of "individualism" (Kusserow 2004:23) and found out in her fieldwork that parents of different social classes in the three New York communities adopt distinct styles of individualism, with middle-class parents employing soft individualism and working-class families practicing hard individualism (Kusserow 2004:170). Similarly, Lareau drew the conclusion that "social class does have a powerful impact in shaping the daily rhythms of family life" (Lareau 2003:8). Economic and social resources are indeed crucial in shaping childrearing practices. Lareau emphasizes "concerted cultivation" and "natural growth" as different tools used by middle-class and working-class parents respectively to groom their children (Lareau 2003:3).

With reference to Kusserow, children in Manhattan and Queens, with the former symbolizing the working-class and the latter representing the middle-class, are socialized into soft and hard styles of individualism respectively. Hard individualism,

which underlines a tough and resilient self-targeting at protecting oneself from violence, misfortune and poverty, is easily found in the childrearing practice of working-class parents. This can be attributed to the working-class parents' concept of their child's self as a unit against the world, and that these working class parents engaging in blue-collar jobs emphasize conformity to externally imposed rules.

On the contrary, soft individualism has a more psychological concept of self, with the emphasis on the delicacy of a child's self, and a focus on the need of abundant resources, extreme care and wide canvas, so as to develop the unique self of the child (Kusserow 2004:v). The middle-class parents perceive their child's self as one unit opening up to the world (Kusserow 2004:26). They are the parents in professional and managerial positions who stress independence, initiative and self-direction. (Kusserow 2004:29) In other words, class-based differences exist in childrearing as epitomized by the two forms of individualisms.

Instead of presenting different types of class-driven parenting using hard and soft individualisms, Lareau in "Unequal Childhoods" reveals the tools of "concerted cultivation" and "natural growth" to demonstrate the distinct childrearing methods between classes. Middle-class children have a much more hectic schedule of organized activities than working class children. Concerted cultivation upheld by middle class parents entails a focus on children's structured activities, active intervention in schooling as well as language development and reasoning at home, elements that are absent in working class families in which parents emphasize more on the natural growth of their children (Lareau 2003:32).

Kuan's *Love's Uncertainty* also draws reference to Lareau's concerted cultivation in her analysis of middle-class families in urban China. Many of her informants, who are the typical middle-class mothers, send their children off to all

sorts of activities during weekends (Kuan 2015:91). They also adopt childrearing practices that conform to middle-class norms mentioned in Lareau's "unequal childhoods". For example, they elicit children's opinions, try their best to foster children's potential and develop interests in them, in hopes of conferring benefits in later life. However, the middle-class Chinese way of parenting still differs from the American way largely because of unique factors in China's economic and social context (Kuan 2015:51).

Both Kusserow and Lareau quote Pierre Bourdieu's social reproduction theory in their analysis of class-based childrearing. Bourdieu's ideas of "habitus" and "cultural capital" are mentioned in "American Individualisms" and "Unequal Childhoods". According to Bourdieu, "social structures are deeply internalized and embodied by individuals of a certain social class" (Kusserow 2004: viii). Apart from economic capital, there are "cultural capital", meaning cultural background, skills, knowledge and other cultural acquisitions transferred from one generation to the next, and "symbolic capital" which is the accumulated honor and prestige. These two types of capital are indeed disguised forms of economic capital. Owing to the fact that middle-class children inherit actual different cultural capital than those from the working class, they develop varied dressing and speaking styles, characteristics that are class-learned rather than personal (Kusserow 2004:ix). With reference to Lareau's analysis, regardless of race, middle-class parents in America activate their cultural and social capital in the process of raising their kids (Lareau 2003:276).

Habitus exerts influence onto individuals since early socialization experiences in which the internalization of external social conditions takes place. (Kusserow 2004: viii) Such deep internalization is not necessarily acquired through explicit rules and teachings, rather, it is through the informal and unconscious modes of socialization

(Kusserow 2004: x). Inspired by Bourdieu, Kusserow initiated her research to find out how children of different social classes acquire class habitus consciously and unconsciously, as well as formally and informally (Kusserow 2004: xi). The three studies illustrate "class" as an important factor in determining childrearing methods. In order to make my comparative research more focused, I decided to explore the Chinese and Danish middle-class way of parenting, and collect data that only pertain to middle-class parents in the two cultural contexts.

The Comparative Method

Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa's "Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited" employs the comparative method between different cultures on the subject of childrearing, which is very relevant to how I conduct my research. With regard to the text, studying education in three countries, namely China, Japan and the United States, contributes to our understanding that cultural difference plays a significant role in grooming children to be different culturally appropriate members of their society even under the dominant force of globalization (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:1).

Based on their participant-observation¹ in the preschools in three cultures and their interviews with the insiders and outsiders² of the research, Tobin and his

¹ Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa spent mornings and afternoons among the cultural insiders to participate and observe the daily activities their informants engaged in. In the evening they asked the informants to reflect on and illustrate those activities (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:6). The venue of their fieldwork is preschool, an important site where child rearing meets education (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:2).

² They interviewed both the insiders and the outsiders and divided them into sources of different levels of explanations: firstly, classroom teachers who are definitely insiders of the research; secondly, early childhood educators who are "outsiders to the focal preschools but insiders to the culture" (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:17); thirdly, the outsiders who are early childhood educators commenting on preschools in the other two cultures and lastly, professors of early childhood education in their cultural context are included (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:19).

colleagues discovered that culture is a source of continuity against complete changes. It serves as a brake on the impacts of rationalization, economic change and globalization (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:1). This can be reflected in the social functions of preschools:

After comparing and contrasting their field work done in three different cultural contexts, Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa discovered that Chinese preschools have become increasingly entrepreneurial and market-driven, as shown by the hybridity of Chinese socialism and the 21st century free market in Chinese preschools, combining the Confucian belief in the power of exemplars and the notion of "branding and positioning oneself in the marketplace" (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:94).

For Japanese preschools, they are treated as sites that can prevent undesired social change and defend endangered traditional cultural values and practices in Japan (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:122). The majority of them still uphold a Japanese-value-based and play-oriented education curricular (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:230). The central goal of the Japanese preschools is still making Japanese children traditionally Japanese (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:240).

For American preschools, they stress on fair competitions and individual rights (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:206). They channel early childhood education towards a scientifically based and practical practice, instead of one that solely focuses on developing academic readiness (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:230).

Through gathering the field notes and presenting different cultural responses under concise subtopics in "Preschools in Three Cultures Revisited", readers are clearly acknowledged the extent of changes preschools have made in response to growing social pressures and expectations on children in capitalist societies over the

past twenty years (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:1). The Chinese preschools changed drastically, the Japanese preschools only a little, and the American preschools are somewhere in between, with dramatic changes in funding and provision but only slight changes in classroom practices and teachers' beliefs (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:224).

The Different Education Contexts between Hong Kong and Denmark

The differences in education contexts between Hong Kong and Denmark are fundamental to our understanding on the parent-child interaction styles in the two cultural backgrounds.

In both Hong Kong and Denmark, preschool education is neither compulsory nor free. Part of the school fees are subsidized by their government. Kindergartens in Hong Kong aim at cultivating positive learning attitudes in toddlers and laying the foundation for their future learning (Education Bureau 2013). Formalized classes which focus on developing children's language skills in an orderly classroom setting exist in Hong Kong preschools but not in the Danish ones. In fact, the earlier stages of Danish pre-school education mostly have the character of childcare rather than formal education. Rather than learning to read and write, the Danish preschool teaching takes the form of play and activities which are development-based (The Ministry of Social Affairs in consultation with the Ministry of Education 2000). Unlike Hong Kong kindergartens which occupy children with traditional school work, kindergartens in Denmark focus on equipping kids with social skills and cultural norms.

Primary and secondary education are mandatory and free in both Hong Kong and Denmark. All children are required to enter primary school at the age of 6. For tertiary and higher education, it remains exclusive in Hong Kong; only about 15000

are offered government-funded places every year, accounting for merely 18% of students annually. The competitive local public examination, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) determines whether students can obtain further education after completing 12-year-free-education in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authorities 2015). On the other hand, in Denmark, tertiary education is open to all students. About 82% of students would pursue further education. The majority of students would take one or two gap years before entering university upon secondary school graduation. They usually travel or gain work experience before pursuing further studies. In Hong Kong, the university places are only partly government-funded, students still have to pay school fees. Qualified candidates would opt for entering university immediately as these tertiary education seats are very hard to obtain. If they do not do so, they would have a high chance of losing the opportunity to pursue a university degree in Hong Kong. On the contrary, tertiary studies are free of charge for people who are born in Denmark or hold a permanent resident visa (Study in Denmark 2015).

For career prospects, in Hong Kong, unless one is graduated from professional or business-related subjects, such as Medicine, Law, Quantitative Finance and Accountancy, students holding a bachelor or even a master degree in other subjects encounter difficulty in finding jobs that can support the spiraling living expenses especially the housing prices; For Denmark, although students graduating from all subjects including Anthropology³ can engage in jobs that fulfill their financial needs, we should not over-romanticize the Danish educational system. Since all students can enter universities and gain a degree eventually, those who choose not to pursue further

3 It should be noted that Anthropology is one of the top 10 most competitive subjects in universities in Denmark. Students have to gain really good grades in their final exam of upper secondary school education in order to major in Anthropology in Danish universities.

studies in tertiary education suffer from high unemployment. Those who do not obtain a university degree can hardly find themselves a job. The same difficulty is encountered by undergraduate students who desire to engage themselves in part-time jobs. One downside of the Danish education policy is that it indirectly restricts the freedom of its people by intensifying the force of pushing all the adolescents to study in universities; and denying the work opportunities of those who do not comply.

When it comes to evaluating parents' response towards the local education system, many Hong Kong parents criticize the spoon feeding, exam-oriented and competitive education system which pressurize themselves and their kids from an early age. Contrarily, the Danes generally feel satisfied with their education system, in which the Danish tertiary education system is known as the world's third best system of higher education (Study in Denmark 2014). In the case of Hong Kong, the long queues outside elite primary schools (Apple Daily 2010), the strong urge to have Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) dropped (Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union 2015), and extreme cases where a child had to have her dinner on her way home because she had too many homework and activities (Oriental News 2015), demonstrate how competitive and pressurized parents and students are under the Hong Kong education system. As for Denmark, there are seldom criticisms directed against their education system. It was even claimed by researchers that the early childhood education is one important reason why Danes are the happiest people in the world (Nation Master 2010)⁴. However, we should not ignore that pressure to

⁴ NationMaster is an internationally recognized statistical website aiming at facilitating the comparison of publicly available data on all countries. This massive central data source is depicted as “a statistician’s dream” by the renowned BBC World and illustrated as being “astounding and easy to use” by the prestigious The New York Times. Concluding from the 2010 World Database of Happiness, Hong Kong Anthropologist. Vol. 8, 2016

get good grades also exist in the Danish context, it is only that it does not happen often on the children but on the youngsters who endeavor to gain high marks to get into popular university subjects. They are known as the "12-talspiger" (12-grade-girls) who give themselves a lot of pressure in striving for 12-grades⁵ in all subjects in their final exam in upper secondary school education (Denmark Guide 2015).

All in all, there is an inextricable linkage between education system and parenthood. We should be sharply aware of how education systems in Hong Kong and Denmark shape parenthood in the two cultural contexts.

Methodology

My research process is divided into two stages: with the first stage being my fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong from September to December 2014; and the second stage being my ethnographic research in Denmark from January to June 2015.

At the beginning of my three months of research in Hong Kong, I started with literature review. After drawing reference from "Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited", I decided to set my research target group to be local kids from 4 to 7 years old who are raised in middle-class families. In my comparative research, middle-class families are categorized as those who have comparatively high level of consumption power. They own private cars, live in private housing estates, travel for leisure and do not have difficulty in fulfilling their basic needs. They would also devote a large

Denmark ranked the first and was publicly known as the happiest nation in the world, with children's satisfaction with their school life being one determining factor (NationMaster 2010).

⁵ The Danish marking scheme operates on a 7-point scale, which are 12, 10, 07, 04, 02, 00, -3. Twelve-grade is equivalent to A in the Hong Kong public examination context, signifying that students have an excellent command in that subject (Denmark Guide 2015).

amount of time, energy and income in childrearing. For my venue of fieldwork, I picked the home setting of the targeted middle-class families which demonstrated a variety of daily interactions between parents and children.

I approached the possible informants in Hong Kong in my social circles. Mrs. Yu is a friend of my cousin; Mrs. Kwong is the client of my parents' company selling baby products; while Mrs. Chung is my high school alumni. I was rejected once by my mother's friend who has a son suffering from infantile autism. It was understandable that she found it difficult and uncomfortable to have me observing how she controlled her son's frequent misbehavior and bad temper. Luckily I later on found Mrs. Chung who welcomed me to spend time in her home.

For the Danish context, it was comparatively difficult to approach possible informants mainly due to my limited social network and incompetence in Danish. Before I went to Denmark in January 2015, I did not speak Danish, and I only knew one local Danish friend from the internet. She was assigned as my mentor for my study in Copenhagen. Eventually she introduced Mrs. Nielsen who ended up being one of my Danish informants.

Back in November 2014 when I was searching for relevant English books regarding the Danish way of parenting, I coincidentally found the website for the nearly-released book of "The Danish Way of Parenting". I immediately emailed the two authors, Jessica Alexander and Iben Dissing Sandahl, and tried to see whether I could get a copy of the book earlier, of utmost importance, I would love to meet them in person and learn more about the Danish childrearing methods from them. To my surprise, they responded instantaneously with a definite "Yes"! However, I could only meet Iben since Jessica was not in Denmark during the time that I was there. Still, it was a very rewarding and inspirational experience meeting Iben. Ultimately Iben

became one of my informants and she even introduced her neighbor Mrs. Funch, another informant, to me on the first day of my routinized visits to her household. In order to facilitate the effectiveness of my fieldwork in the three Danish households, I learnt Danish on the fifth day upon my arrival and obtained an intermediate level in Danish before I started my fieldwork.

Inspired by “Preschools in Three Cultures Revisited”, I paid five routinized visits to all six middle-class families. I conducted participant-observations from days till nights. Before I began my participant-observation on the first day of visit, I would explain the aims of my research project in details, clarify my role in the coming visits, and present my verification sheet with the signature of Professor Teresa Kuan to my informants, proving that all the data collected is for academic purpose. This act of reassurance made my informants feel more at ease with me being around in their households.

On the last day of my routinized visit, I organized a semi-structured interview with the targeted parents and children separately. Aside from interviewing the insiders, I also conducted semi-structured interview with the outsider, which is the aforementioned Danish author of her book regarding parenting in the Danish context.

Semi-structured interviews are preferred in this research as they allow interviewees to be more relaxed when answering the questions. Furthermore, both the interviewer and interviewee can ask follow-up questions and provide immediate responses during the semi-structured interviews. Any kinds of unforeseen responses are allowed. Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews encourage informants to come up with more diverse responses that offer new insights to this comparative research.

Below is the basic information of my informants:

HONG KONG:

Family Name	Child	Age	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
Yu	Natalie	6	Professor	Structural Engineer
Kwong	Megan	4	Housewife	Swimsuit Company Owner
Chung	Colin	6	Housewife	Broadcasting Engineer

DENMARK:

Family Name	Child	Age	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
Sandahl	Julie	7	Teacher/Author	Graphic Designer
Funch	Maja	5	Lawyer	Executive Producer
Nielsen	Michael	6	Housewife	Doctor

The analysis would discussed the parent-child interactive styles in terms of similarities and differences. In the first part, the similarities are laid out:

Absence of Hierarchical Relationships within Families

Parents and their children speak on equal status to one another. Neither parents

nor children have a higher status within the three families in Hong Kong. During my fieldwork, parents would scold their children for not obeying their orders; children would blame their parents for not listening to what they said. Parents and children would both apologize to one another when they think they have done something wrong. Kids in all 6 families are unafraid of disagreeing, clarifying and challenging their parents.

First of all, in the Yu's family in Hong Kong, Natalie always calls her parents "stupid pigs" when they are being outwitted by her. Mr. and Mrs. Yu simply smile to this "nickname" their daughter had given her, without being angry. Natalie very often bosses her mother around, for instance, when she was doing homework, she ordered Mrs. Yu to get her a wet towel to wipe her lips which were dirty. She orders her two domestic workers to do things for her in the same way. However, in some cases, her parents refuse to act according to her orders but ask her to do them by herself. For example, when she whined about being very hot during dinner, wanting her dad to turn on the air-conditioner for her, her dad rejected her request and told her to turn it on herself. Natalie usually gets mad when parents are not paying attention to what she says or not answering her questions, she would then say to them in her loud voice: "I was talking to you! Why didn't you listen to me?" Parents would then listen to her patiently. In the Kwong's family, Megan would not hesitate to correct her mother when Mrs. Kwong mispronounced her English teacher's name. In my five days of visit to the Kwong's family, I heard Megan correcting her mother on the her pronunciations of "Ms. Elise" and "Ms. Alice", the names of her teachers, at least thrice. Megan blames her mother sometimes, for example, when her mother misplaces her schoolbag in the other cabinet. She would say: "Mommy, I told you many times already. My school bag should not be placed here!" Every time Mrs. Kwong discovers

that she has done something wrong, she apologizes immediately to her daughter. Indeed, the Kwong parents are very polite to their children by saying “please” and “thank you” to Megan all the time.

In the Chung family, likewise, Colin and his parents are of equal status in their interactions with one another. Sometimes, Colin challenges his parents by asking whether they realize all the differences between his toy cars; very often Mr. and Mrs. Chung would be outwitted by his expert knowledge on cars. When Mrs. Chung threatened to throw away Colin’s favorite toy cars, Colin replied in strong words: “If you really do so, I will definitely hit you and punch you in your face!” He claimed that the value of half of his toy cars equals to his mother, while that of the other half being equivalent to his father, exhibiting the enormous importance he places on his toy cars.

The equal status between parents and children also applies to my informants in the Danish context. During tea time, 6-year-old Michael simply ordered Mrs. Nielsen by saying "Pass me the juice, Mom" without saying "Please" or "Thank you" afterwards. Mrs. Nielsen acted according to his request without showing any dismay, treating it as their normal interaction.

In the Sandahl's family, Mrs. Sandahl is always willing to apologize to Julie whenever she thinks she has to. There was one afternoon when Mrs. Sandahl encountered difficulty in using Instagram, she immediately asked Julie to come down in a loud voice. Julie slowly came down from her room with her hands rubbing her eyes, clearly she was wakened from a nap. Mrs. Nielsen felt very sorry about waking her daughter for such a trivial matter and sincerely apologized.

In the Funch's household, Maja do not hesitate to disagree with her parents at times she thinks they give out the wrong information. An example would be when

Mrs. Funch told Maja that grandma will visit them in the coming Friday. Maja instantly disagreed by saying "I don't think so. Grandma said she will come on Thursday instead!" Mrs. Funch reacted with a doubtful face and called grandma for confirmation afterwards. It turned out that Maja remembered the date correctly.

The absence of hierarchical relationship in a family setting fosters the expressive character of children. Living in such an egalitarian environment, kids do not fear to speak their mind. In the Hong Kong case, kids see the importance of themselves and become eager to seek for attention from others, fulfilling the three pairs of parents' aim to develop their kids into leaders who are expressive and sociable. This goes in accordance with what Mrs. Chung said in the interview: "To be sociable is one of the characteristics I want Colin to possess."

For the 3 pairs of Danish parents, rather than shaping their children to be future leaders, the main purpose for the absence of hierarchy within families is to reduce power struggles between parents and children, as Mrs. Sandahl pointed out: "I don't want power conflicts in my family as we will easily lose temper because of that. The absence of ranking within families can foster trust and resilience in their children, promoting harmonic family relationships."

Intimate Parent-Child Relationship Mediated by Consumption

In all 6 families, either from Hong Kong or Denmark, intimate relationship were developed between parents and children. They spend a lot of family time together in after-school and after-work period, as well as in holidays. Parents would create a variety of family activities to strengthen their intimacy. However, it should be

noted that a considerable amount of their intimacy is indeed built on material culture and consumerism.

In Hong Kong, I observed that whenever it is possible, Mr. Yu would drive Natalie home after school or extra-curricular activities. In the meantime, they never stop talking to one another. Natalie often tells him her school affairs and asks for their plans for the coming weekend. When Natalie wants to practice singing for the coming competition before she sleeps, Mr. and Mrs. Yu would immediately become her audience and sit in front of her. Mr. Yu was the one who turned on the music while Mrs. Yu was responsible for recording her song. Afterwards, they watched Natalie's singing video together and laughed happily. Aside from their frequent daily conversations, their intimacy is strengthened by numerous family activities such as watching musicals and going to Hong Kong Disneyland together, as shown by their sweet family photos from their Facebook account. In my five days of fieldwork in the Yu's family, Natalie constantly expressed her anticipation of going to Disneyland in the coming Halloween, which is a very costly consumption when compared to the entrance fees of other attractions in Hong Kong. In the Yu's case, intimacy between parents and child is fostered by the driving journey, singing practice, watching musicals and visiting theme park together, activities that are built on consumptions.

In the case of the Kwong's, I always heard Mrs. Kwong expressing love to Megan, by calling her "sweetheart" and saying "I love you" to her all the time. Similar to the Yu's, Mr. and Mrs. Kwong spend a lot of time with their daughter. For instance, they would bring Megan to Tai Po Waterfront Park every Sunday, Ocean Park and Disneyland during holidays. The latter two theme parks are again expensive venues for family gatherings.

From the photo albums Colin has shown me during my visits, Mr. and Mrs.

Chung created a happy and sweet family life for Colin. The annual photo albums, made by his parents, are dedicated to their son every Christmas. They are records of sweet memories of the Chung's family. They even take "a picture a day" to document Colin's growth. The photos delineate various "first-time" of Colin: the first time for him to go Disneyland, the first day of attending playgroup, the first time to go to flower market etc. Since the Chung's did not hire a domestic helper, Mr. and Mrs. Chung spend more time in taking care of Colin as compared to the other two families, with Mrs. Chung being the one who takes him to school and picks him up after school; and Mr. Chung, who calls his family every day after work, asking his family whether they need him to buy anything. Sometimes, he makes Colin very happy by bringing surprises to him, such as buying a new toy car or a new bicycle after work. It should not be ignored that these surprises which foster intimacy between parents and child are created by consumptions.

For my Danish informants, before I illustrate their intimate parent-child behaviors, it is essential to discuss their concept of "hygge" as part of their cultural foundation (Alexander and Sandahl 2014:135). Danes perceive "hygge" as their way of life, that is, cozy moments they spend together with family and friends. The word "hygge" is derived from the Germanic word "hyggja", meaning to feel satisfied or a comfortable mood (Alexander and Sandahl 2014:136). "Hygge" implies the idea of "putting oneself aside for the benefit of the whole" (Alexander and Sandahl 2014:137). The Danes highly value "hygge" as in their point of view, feeling connected to others gives purpose to their lives. They try to incorporate "hygge" into their everyday life. This habit can be epitomized by the intimate relationships shared by my informants in the Danish context.

During my first visit to the Sandahls, the beautifully and meticulously drawn

calendar, which is attached on the refrigerator, captured my attention. From 4 different sets of handwritings I came up with the conclusion that all family members participate in updating this calendar. Among all the family activities including picnic, swimming, travelling, the phrase "NOMA at 7pm" marked on 26th June 2015 interested me the most. NOMA is known as the world's number 1 restaurant (William Reed Business Media 2015). The minimum price for each customer is 2000DKK, which is around 2400HKD per person. Mrs. Sandahl surprised me by telling me that it is a family dinner. As neither one of them have tried NOMA before, Mr. and Mrs. Sandahl decided to bring their two daughters to dine at the most prestigious restaurant in the world, regardless of how much it costs. They would not go alone as a pair of married couple as they treat it as a family gathering. This overpriced family activity is a typical example demonstrating how parent-child intimacy is mediated by large consumptions.

When it comes to travelling, all 3 Danish families travel to different countries at least twice a year. For the Funchs, they travel up to 4 times a year. Their family has already been to Asia, North and South America. Maja told me that she loves Miami the most as "there is really nice water. I like the culture there too. It has a lot of possibilities. We went shopping and ate in very good restaurants." Demonstrated by their frequent engagement in travelling, shopping and eating in decent restaurants, the family intimacy enjoyed by the Funchs is facilitated by consumerism and the material culture.

Birthday parties for kids are considered as necessary in all 6 households. When asked how often Mrs. Nielsen would organize birthday party for Michael, she answered: "Every year of course! Birthdays are some of the biggest dates in families! It is quality time with friends and family." According to Mrs. Nielsen, they would

invite Michael's friends and relatives to come by and cozy around together. They would light candles, play games, sing together, eat nice meals and Mrs. Nielsen would make a big birthday cake and prepare tea for their guests. According to Mr. Nielsen, during birthdays and family activities, every one of them would try to leave their personal problems behind and fully immerse them into the "hygge" atmosphere as they value the cozy time together very much. This activity of preparing birthday parties might appear to be a more economical family activity to reinforce the closeness between parents and children, yet, the purchase of birthday presents and party materials such as candles and decorations demonstrate the unbreakable connection between birthday parties and consumptions.

As delineated by the above six cases, parent-child intimacy in these middle-class families is mediated by consumption and consumerism, regardless of their different cultural and social contexts.

Lenient Punishment aiming at Reflections

Even though my Hong Kong and Danish informants avoid creating hierarchical relationships within their households, and empower their children by encouraging egalitarian communications between parent and children, there are in fact certain lines that cannot be crossed by their kids. These middle-class parents still want to maintain their certain extent of control over their children, as demonstrated by the punishments towards their kids. Rather than practicing corporal punishment, my informants resort to non-physical and lenient verbal discipline on children. Instead of hurting them physically, these parents want their children to reflect on their own misbehaviors and learn from their mistakes.

In Hong Kong's cases, both the Yu's and the Kwong's parents would resort to

the means of scolding their naughty children and locking them at a room for a short period of time afterwards, as a form of punishment for disobedience. The reason for Mr. Yu to punish Natalie was due to her refusal to have dinner first before playing; while Mrs. Kwong did that to Megan because she whined unreasonably and refused to wear her shoes by herself before going out to play. After telling their children what they had done wrong in a loud voice, they would bring them into a dark room and make them reflect on their wrongdoings inside. Usually after a few minutes they would stop crying and apologize to their parents, admitting what they had done wrong and promising to not commit the same error.

In the case of the Chung's, besides disobedience, Mr. Chung punished Colin for repeating his mistakes using verbal punishment. She would scold him angrily and demand him to stand for a period of time facing the wall until he conveyed that he understood what he did wrong and apologized.

In Denmark, spanking became illegal in 1984 as the Danes think spanking does not work and would "wreak havoc on kids' long-term development" (Alexander and Sandahl 2014:112). They fear that children who are spanked by parents might feel devalued and depressed (Alexander and Sandahl 2014:113).

Mr. and Mrs. Funch would scold Maja and her elder sister Erika when they are biting and hitting one another. There was one occasion when Maja hit Mrs. Funch because Mrs. refused to allow her to eat snacks. Like the Yu's and the Kwong's, Mrs. Funch dragged Maja to her room and asked her to stay inside until she would apologize.

During my interview with Mrs. Sandahl, I learnt about one special tradition in Danish schools, which is allowing students to decide the code of conduct together with their teachers annually. This is a meaningful activity aimed at promoting

democracy and regular class behavior. Through this cooperation, students develop an in-depth understanding of the school rules and a strong sense of responsibility towards the other students as well as their teachers. The practice can minimize the chance of students acting against the collectively-designed code of conduct. Even during the times when students truly violate the rules, they would be more easily convinced by the reasons why they have to suffer from punishment afterwards. Therefore, with regard to Mrs. Sandahl during the interview, she would try her best to avoid punishing Julie through discussing and designing rules for their family. She added that she is absolutely against spanking.

After viewing the above illustrations, it should be noted that no matter how much these middle-class parents try to reduce the power differential between parent and child, certain kinds of punishment are practiced to reinforce parental control and guidance over their children. Through practicing the above described non-physical punishment towards children, parents try make their children understand what they had done wrong and make them promise that they would not commit the same mistakes again. Their refusal to adopt spanking is attributed to their understanding that physical punishment may lead to children's inability to regulate emotions and stress, destroying the integrity and safety of one's family.

Distinct childhood experiences between Parents and Children

Interestingly, all parents in the six families created a childhood experience for their children, an experience which is very different from theirs. With reference to the semi-structured interviews, the intergenerational differences of childhoods can be

ascribed to the distinctive social environment or their desire to create a "better childhood" for their children.

For my Hong Kong informants, they groom their children differently from how their parents raised them mainly due to the more competitive educational environment. According to Mrs. Chung: "Back in those days when I was a child, not much planning was needed beforehand. I didn't need to join so many extra-curricular activities. My mom and dad did not have to carefully select schools for me ". Her parents simply enrolled her into whichever school she was assigned to, a school which was not far from where she lived. Neither of her parents would teach nor check her homework. She just finished them on her own. Contrary to her childhood, Mrs. Chung plans a lot of things ahead for Colin. Well aware of the change of social environment and the dominance of cutthroat education context in Hong Kong, Mrs. Chung is pressurized to do everything she can to enhance Colin's competitiveness. "What would you do when parents around you are all finding good schools for their kids? Would you still sit at home and do nothing for your child?" Mrs. Chung challenged, demonstrating that pressure also came from her peers. Contrary to her parents who only expected her to be a secondary school graduate who is capable of supporting herself financially; Mrs. Chung, who turns out to be a university graduate, has much higher expectation on Colin. She wants him to at least attain the same or a higher education level than herself.

Likewise, Mrs. Yu creates an intensive childhood for Natalie which is distinctive from hers, lest Natalie would be put at a disadvantaged position. Similar to Mrs. Chung's, Mrs. Yu's childhood was much less demanding than Natalie's. She did not have a packed schedule of tutorial classes or activities. "Hong Kong back then had much less opportunities and my parents did not have that many resources to develop

me." said Mrs. Yu. Now she is more financially-equipped, she wants to create more possibilities for Natalie by investing more on her. Mr. and Mrs. Yu believe that sharpening Natalie's competitive edge at an early age can guarantee her a good future ahead.

For my Danish informants, rather than adapting to the present social background, the major reason for the parents to create a different childhood for their kids is to offer their children what parents themselves lacked or failed to experience during their own childhood.

Take the example of Mrs. Funch, she always wished to travel around the globe together with her parents when she was a little girl, yet her parents were unable to fulfill her desire due to financial concerns. To compensate for the inability to travel during her own childhood and eliminate any possible regrets of Maja, Mrs. Funch travels frequently with her husband and her 5-year-old Maja.

For Mrs. Nielsen, her parents divorced when she was only 3 years old. She seldom saw her mom and spent most of her toddler years with her dad, without receiving much affection. She and her dad had to move a lot and adapted to different neighborhood areas. "I want to create a happier childhood, a sweeter familial relationship, and a more stable household for Michael." expressed Mrs. Nielsen. Her childhood experience explains why she frequently hugs, kisses and says "I love you" to Michael, and enjoys being a housewife who spends most of her time staying at home to take care of Michael.

My informants in both cultural contexts demonstrate why and how parents in different contexts create a childhood for their kids that is contrasting to theirs in certain aspects, with Hong Kong parents being compelled by the increasing social pressure and expectations on children; and Danish parents being driven by their

personal urge to compensate for what their childhood lacked, revealing that the parents' own experiences also shape their childrearing methods. The above examples illustrate that comparing to that of the Danish context, the hardened structure in the Hong Kong context, where social competition dominates, is more repressive and forceful in driving appropriate personal response from the irreducible particulars to the social system.

Moral Socialization in Everyday Life

During my fieldwork, I noticed that socialization of moral values took place in all six families. Moral values are being transmitted from parents to children in their daily interactions and activities.

In daily activities, the three pairs of Hong Kong parents inculcate certain social and moral values into children's minds. Here are three examples: Firstly, Mrs. Yu insisted on asking Natalie to say goodbye to her Mandarin tutorial teacher before she left their home, as she thought Natalie should be polite to others. Secondly, when Mrs. Kwong saw Megan's tissue papers were on the floor, she would ask Megan to apologize and throw them back to the rubbish bin herself. Thirdly, after Colin told Mrs. Chung that he was being mistaken by the teacher for being the culprit who initiated the practical joke. The teacher only discovered he was wrong after punishing Colin. Mrs. Chung then asked Colin whether the teacher had apologized to him, Colin said no. Mrs. Chung told Colin that he should ask his teacher to apologize to him, because everyone, including teachers, should at least say sorry after making mistakes. Mrs. Chung's teaching to Colin also exemplifies the above-mentioned concept of empowering children through reducing power differentials, in this case, between teachers and students.

For my Danish informants, all three pairs of parents instill ethical values into their children during daily interactions. I noticed that Mrs. Funch always adds the phrase "for me" before or after stating her opinion. For example, "For me, this TV show is not funny" and "This bread does not taste good when toasted, for me" This allows Maja to acknowledge that others may have a different perspective or preference from her and she has to respect these differences.

During dinner time in my fourth day of visit to the Nielsen's, Michael brought up the issue of his classmate Thomas bullying Peter who was physically smaller. Mr. and Mrs. Nielsen dealt with the issue very seriously and discussed this matter for a long time with Michael. "If you were Peter, how would you feel?" Parents encouraged Michael to think from the victim's perspective. They wanted Michael to be more caring and considerate, as well as to understand that he should never cause harm to anybody.

For Mrs. Sandahl, a teacher herself, she particularly approves of how the Danish preschools foster teamwork and collaboration, as well as how they encourage respect and empathy through mixing children of different strengths and weaknesses together. For example, teachers put the introverted students together with the extroverted ones. The group of students with different qualities would have to complete various tasks such as building a clock tower using Legos. Iben tries to incorporate this practice to her own household by eagerly engaging Julie and her elder sister Ida in a variety of games and tasks. For instance, during my fieldwork, they would be encouraged to play chess together. Afterwards, Mrs. Sandahl would ask each of them: "What are the strengths of you and your sister in this game? Julie answered: "I think quickly. Ida is more careful." Mrs. Sandahl treasures this post-game question-answer section a lot as she wants Julie to discover strengths in her and learn

to appreciate the others as well. Meanwhile, this can bring the sisters closer together.

From the above examples, we learnt that moral values are being socialized and transmitted from parents to children in these 6 middle-class households through daily interactions and activities.

Imagination of the Future Shapes their Present

After conducting in-depth fieldwork in the 6 families, I got to understand how bigger future life plans shape smaller daily routines in these middle-class families.

In the case of Hong Kong families, for the Yu's, the parents applied for many extra-curricular activities and tutorial classes for her, in hopes of sending Natalie into a more elite secondary school in the future and increasing her competitiveness in the Hong Kong education context. Her weekly schedule of activities after school and during weekends is listed in the following:

Monday	Singing lesson
Tuesday	Mandarin private tutorial lesson
Wednesday	English private tutorial lesson
Thursday	/
Friday	Fencing lesson
Saturday	Piano lesson
Sunday	English tutorial lesson at British Council

The table demonstrates Natalie's packed schedule. She has activities almost every day, reflecting her parents' strong urge in cultivating Natalie's talents at her young age.

For the Kwong's, since they are emigrating to the New Zealand anyway in their near future, Mrs. Kwong finds it unnecessary to please the schools in Hong Kong by incorporating so many organized activities during Megan's childhood. As Hong Kong Anthropologist. Vol. 8, 2016

illustrated in the above, Mrs. Kwong would rather treasure Megan's playtime and family time by allowing her to play more during school hours.

Owing to their plan of sending Megan to schools in New Zealand, English proficiency is of utmost significance for her to adapt to the new study environment. Their future life plan explains why they adopt English as the major medium of daily communication at home. Mrs. Kwong mainly uses English to teach her to do homework, whether the subject is English, Math or General Education. Cantonese and Mandarin are only employed while Megan is working on her Chinese homework.

It should be stressed that in the interview, I asked Mrs. Kwong whether she would change her rearing method if their family eventually has to stay in Hong Kong. She hesitated and thought thoroughly before saying: "Yes. I think I will force myself to listen more to the opinions of other parents and perhaps, follow their methods in some aspects." Her answer clearly delineates that it was their big family plan of migrating to New Zealand that determined her way of rearing Megan.

For the Chung's, in view of preparing Colin to take the IB exam in the future, Mr. and Mrs. Chung applied Diocesan Boys' School (DBS) for him. DBS, different from most schools in Hong Kong, is an elite school which allows students to choose either to take HKDSE or HKIB. Knowing that DBS provides abundant resources, including highly-trained teachers, an independent building, and a huge library, for preparing their students to take the IB exam, they eventually chose this school for their child. Aside from doing comprehensive research and making choice for Colin, similar to the Kwong's family, they stress on the use of English in their daily conversations, so as to prepare him to sit for the IB exam which requires a high level of English Language Proficiency.

For my Danish informants, their long-term plans are comparatively more

similar with each other than the Hong Kong families. None of the 3 Danish families intend to emigrate or train their children to sit for any public exam other than the local Danish examination, an exam taken place during the last year of upper secondary school education at students' own high school, which guarantees every student a chance to study in university. The exam only serves as an indicator to determine which subjects students are qualified to choose in universities (Denmark Guide 2015). Furthermore, none of my Danish informants plan to send their kids to "elite schools", a term that is entirely alien to them. They simply enroll their children in whichever school assigned by the government. When my informants received the question on "what defies the success of your child?", the Hong Kong parents provided typical answers like "A university degree, a well-paid job and a happy life" while the Danish parents responded by mere coincidence that "success is defined by their courage to do what they like". They did not include "university degree" in their answers probably because it is accessible to all Danish students.

In the absence of a competitive education environment and job market in Denmark, my Danish informants create a relaxed afterschool schedule for children. Each of my targeted kids only engage themselves in 2 extra-curricular activities, with Julie learning hip-hop dance and swimming; Maja mastering piano and gymnastics; and Michael playing football and flute. All of them do not attend tutorial classes. According to Mrs. Funch, attending tutorial class is not a norm in Denmark.

How the imagination of the future shapes the present can also be delineated by the small act of Mrs. Sandahl purchasing a new camera for Julie. When asked what she wants to be in the future, Julie answered immediately without a second thought: "a photographer". Mrs. Sandahl has known that for some time. She answered me in the interview that one of Julie's leisure activities is to take pictures of the flowers

while walking in the garden. On the fifth day of my visit, Mrs. Sandahl surprisingly bought Julie a new camera with more functions in it. The overjoyed Julie instantly requested Mr. Sandahl to teach her how to use her new camera upon thanking her mom by kissing her on both cheeks. Mrs. Sandahl wishes that this new present can lead Julie one step closer to achieving her dream.

All in all, my informants' future vision very much frames their present parent-child interactions.

Inconsistency of Parents' Actions and Words

During my time with the three families, it is interesting to observe the various inconsistencies in what parents do and say. When it comes to discussing parents' cultivation on children, no matter how easygoing they try to present themselves during the interviews, their actions demonstrate that they are often not. They seem to allow "sufficient" play time to their kids; indeed, it turns out to be not the case. They expressed that they are totally open to their kids' interests and preferences; however, it is not the truth as illustrated in the following:

When I asked the Yu's parents how much time they would allow Natalie to play every day after school, they answered "at least two hours". Yet, from what I have observed in five weekdays, Natalie can at most play for only an hour every day. Even in days when Natalie does not have to learn extra-curricular activities outside home, she usually has to undertake tutorial lessons at home. After that, it is already dinner time. Upon finishing dinner, Natalie is required to do homework and revision. Before she sleeps, she needs to practice piano or singing. Even during times when Mrs. Yu told Natalie that she could play for a while after finishing her homework, motivating her to do homework quickly, eventually Mrs. Yu did not fulfill her promise into letting

Natalie play. She simply took out the English textbook and guided her to memorize the newly taught vocabularies. In another similar situation, she promised Natalie to play chess with her after dinner for half an hour till 8:45pm, yet, eventually she went against her words by playing with her for 15 minutes only. Natalie had to continue with her study at 8:30pm.

During the interview, I asked the Yu's parents whether they had a strong urge for Natalie to get into elite schools in Hong Kong. They told me they did not have a strong urge for it, they only wanted Natalie to grow in a healthy school environment. They found ordinary schools acceptable too. In contrary to their answers, Natalie's elder sister told me before that the Yu's parents actually tried to apply many elite primary schools for Natalie and told her that she must get into one of them.

Mrs. Kwong in her interview stressed that she was unlike the typical Hong Kong parents, who focus on children's academic study and cultivation of talents a lot. Instead, she said she allowed very much playtime for Megan to naturally find her talents in a comfortable way, without any pressure. However, I saw in Megan's files various completed application forms for interview preparation classes, lessons which teach kids to increase their competitiveness and perform well in interviews of primary school. Contrary to how Mrs. Kwong claimed herself and her husband to be parents who do not care much about their kids' academic study, they always buy exercise books for Megan and order her to work on them.

Mrs. Chung asserts that she is very different from other Hong Kong parents as she allows much time for Colin to play, relax and develop his own creativity. Instead of wanting Colin to be robotic and following instructions all the time, Mrs. Chung claimed that she wants him to freely do whatever he wants. Nonetheless, when it comes to discussing his future career, Colin, who is obsessed with cars and buses,

disclosed: "I want to be a bus driver in the future!" Mrs. Chung, upon hearing that, became very nervous about it. She insisted that he should instead be a professional Bus Engineer. She tried to persuade Colin to change his wish by saying: "Not only bus drivers can drive buses, bus engineers can do that too!" Mrs. Chung eagerly told Colin that after becoming a bus engineer, he can actually be a professional in designing cars based on his own interests. Colin eventually agreed that he would be a bus engineer in the future. Mrs. Chung immediately expressed a sigh of relief after that.

Base on the above differences between what parents said and did, it is demonstrated that parents in all three families are actually not that open-minded to all the interests of their kids.

For the 3 pairs of Danish parents, the disparity between what they said and did lies in the aspects of homework and punishment.

Mrs. Nielsen claimed that homework is not that important to her and that she does not have the habit of checking Michael's homework. She only provided guidance on homework upon his requests. Paradoxically, after Michael finished doing their homework in the afternoon, he left his completed workbooks and worksheets on their desk, without packing them into his schoolbag, saying that mom will check them after dinner. Mrs. Nielsen does seem to care about Michael's homework a lot more than I initially thought.

From my interview with Mrs. Sandahl and Mrs. Funch, they told me they would never scold their kids because this is bad for children's psychological development. However, I encountered the situation when there are fights between their kid and her sibling. For example, when Julie and her sister Ida argued and hit one another because of the Cinderella cup they wanted to use at the same time, the stressed Mrs. Sandahl would yell: "STOP IT! PUT DOWN THE CUP! NEITHER OF

YOU CAN USE IT!". Another example would be Maja and Erika's biting and fighting because Erika had accidentally ripped the dress of Maja's favorite Barbie doll. Mrs. Funch loudly demanded them to stop fighting, to apologize to one another and to state their wrongdoings.

The 3 pairs of Danish parents presented themselves to be easy-going caregivers who do not care so much about academic progress or would not react dramatically even when their children did something wrong. In the end, similar to my informants from Hong Kong, there were times when their actions contradicted their words.

High Daily Life Satisfaction among Children

Base entirely on my semi-structured interviews with the six kids, this section on daily life satisfaction among children is presented from the emic perspectives of my young informants. All of my six young informants expressed that they are very satisfied with their joyful everyday life, even though they are experiencing distinct childhoods in very different contexts. Below are some of the comments given by the children:

In Hong Kong's cases, no matter how the outsiders perceive Natalie to be a very busy and miserable kid who is packed with stressful school work and activities every day, she is personally very satisfied with her family life. Natalie truly enjoys the extra-curricular activities her parents registered for her. She particularly loves attending singing classes.

Likewise, Colin does not perceive himself as a very busy boy. He is overjoyed and proud of being chosen to be part of the school's orchestra, choir, and Mandarin choral speaking team. When asked for the reason why he had to join all these

activities, he simply answered with a mischievous smile: "I simply wanted to play." Surprisingly, Colin does not find these activities stressful; contrarily, he finds them enjoyable.

For the 3 Danish kids, they expressed sheer happiness when discussing their daily life in Denmark. Maja articulated that she particularly loves spending time with her family. "I cannot imagine a better family life", she exclaimed. Aside from mentioning how much she loves her family, Julie verbally demonstrated her satisfaction towards her school life and her leisure time every day. Her favorite leisure activity is playing with her beloved family and friends in parks and playgrounds.

From the comments given by the middle-class children in the two contexts, however different their familial childrearing practices are, no matter how dreadful the etic perspectives perceive some of their childhoods to be, all 6 children feel satisfied with their daily life.

After discussing all the similarities, the following session would illustrate the parent-child interactive styles differences between Hong Kong and Denmark.

Maximization of Time for Education VS. Play

From what I have learnt from the semi-structured interviews and the parent-child dialogues among my informants, I discovered that my informants from the two cultural contexts have diverse understanding on the meaning of "play". The Hong Kong parents interpret "play" as a relief from serious learning; while the Danish parents view "play" as serious learning for children. This largely explains why the former group maximizes their children's time for education while the latter would like to provide their children with as much playtime as possible.

Play, where children are "left to their own devices, with a friend or alone, to

play exactly as they see fit for as long as they want" (Alexander and Sandahl 2014:25), is always highly valued as a learning process in Denmark. Lego, one of the most popular and influential toys of all time, originated in Denmark. Lego in Danish is "Leg godt", meaning "play well". It was designed to encourage the limitless imagination of children. Their creativity flourishes when they use those colorful building blocks to build whatever they want.

Aside from Legos, Denmark is a pioneer of amusement parks, places for gathering and entertaining a large group of people as well as fostering and cultivating one's imagination and creativity. It is worth-noting that even the first Disneyland in the world was created based on the design Denmark's Tivoli, the second-oldest amusement park in the world (Harris 2008:8). For my Danish informants, amusement parks occupy their significant amount of time.

During my fieldwork in the Nielsen's, Michael always looks forward to spending their family weekend in Dyrehavsbakken, the world's oldest amusement park in Klampenborg, Denmark. For Maja, her favorite place in Denmark is Tivoli, which is famous for its "hygge" atmosphere. Maja loves going on the rides and game booths together with her family and friends inside Tivoli. Mr. Funch bought a Tivoli's annual pass for each family member as he likes going on picnics inside Tivoli with his family. In order to deepen my understanding on the Danish kids' favorability towards the theme parks of their country, I deliberately bought an annual pass of Tivoli during my six-month research period in Denmark.

Located right at the heart of Copenhagen, Tivoli opens from 11am till midnight. From my frequent visits to Tivoli, I was shocked by the distinctiveness of the amusement park. Unlike the other theme parks I have been to in the past 22 years, Tivoli is unique in the sense that it does not have a specific theme or symbolic cartoon

characters. Their gimmick is exactly their unique "hygge", meaning cozy, atmosphere which encourages people to come and play as frequent as possible. Tivoli's coziness is attributed partly to its concentration of a huge variety of rides, attractions, restaurants, markets, stages in its small total area. I could always see different groups of people, including families, school tours, young and old couples, large groups of friends and even animals including peacocks walking around inside the park. Sometime there are open markets during festivals such as Christmas and Halloween.

One special element of Tivoli is its big stage at the middle of the park. Instead of seeing rides once you get in, you see a large area covered with grass in front of a sizable stage for performances ranging from pop stars such as Lady Gaga and Elton John to anonymous Danish teenagers and children. The big stage at the obvious spot of the park is designed to facilitate artistry, innovation and the delineation of talents among people from all walks of life, especially Danish children. Amusement parks including the famous Tivoli, Dyrehavsbakken and Legoland Billund Resort encourage and provide mediums for parents to maximize children's time for play.

Comparing to Hong Kong children, Danish kids spend less time on education. Many years ago, Danish children were not even allowed to start schooling before they were 7 years old, because Danes believed that children should play more before engaging in education (Alexander and Sandahl 2014:27). Mrs. Sandahl believes that playing can prevent children's anxiety and depression. For Mr. Lunch, play allows children to learn to cope with stress. On top of these, to Mrs. Nielsen, play teaches children resilience and enhances their life adaptability skills. Parents from the three Danish families perceive "play" as an important learning experience for their children.

From the ethnography, we learn that Julie from Denmark has approximately 3 hours of playing after school, post-dinner play-time excluded; whereas Natalie from

Hong Kong is constantly denied of her playtime after she comes back from tutorial class. When asked "How much time do you allow your kid to play every day?", Mrs. Funch answered: "I don't have a time limit for that. As much as possible I would say. Usually Maja plays for at least 3 hours a day, and I also play together with her." When Mrs. Chung received the same question, "Approximately one hour. I am already much more generous than the other Hong Kong parents. This explains why Colin does not have enough time to study." said she, clearly distinguishing playing from learning.

Their distinct amount of homework for children between the two contexts also contributes to the different time allocations for play. For Michael in Denmark, he has only 1 page of math homework every week. He is required to write a short story in Danish in 3 weeks. Every day he at most receives 3 small homework assignments. He can always finish them in an hour after school. He has no more than 1 test every week. Michael's school schedule is much more relaxed comparing to Natalie's. Natalie normally receives 7 homework assignments every school day. When there is a public holiday, she can get 10 or more assignments on the weekday before, including Chinese and English writing, calligraphy, reading comprehension, Math workbook and worksheets, art project etc. At the same time, she has multiple quizzes, dictations or tests in a week. Homework occupies a major proportion of time after school. In other words, her school assignments deny her playtime.

Even when Natalie has free time after finishing her school work, Mr. and Mrs. Yu would maximize the time for educational purposes. One example would be the time when Mrs. Yu she would teach Natalie how to spell "hair dryer" while drying her hair at night, grasping every possible opportunity to teach Natalie English. Another example can be demonstrated in the choice of television programs for Natalie in post-homework period. Natalie seldom has time to watch television. The news

program is one of the few television programs the Yu's parents allow her to watch, as they think unlike many other programs such as cartoons and soap operas, news convey beneficial and useful knowledge to Natalie. The parents would even explain to Natalie what the advertisements are trying to sell to the audience.

Apart from homework assignments, tutorial classes also occupy part of the supposed-to-be leisure time of Natalie and Colin, children who will continue their academic studies in Hong Kong. On the contrary, the three little Danish informants do not have to attend any tutorial classes or frequently prepare for intensive tests and examinations. In order to enhance Natalie's competitiveness in the Hong Kong educational system, during her revision, Mrs. Yu would demand Natalie to spell the vocabularies that need not to be tested. Natalie spends most of her time doing homework and revising every day after school. She has very little time for rest, let alone play. In other words, while the leisure time for Julie is maximized for play, Natalie's free time is very much maximized for educational purpose.

Aim at Competition VS. Inspiration

The common goal for my Hong Kong informants, excluding the Kwong's who planned to emigrate, is to rear children who can outcompete their peers and survive in their cutthroat education environment, embodying the idea of the survival of the fittest; whereas for my Danish informants, they are more driven to the target of inspiring children and developing their inner drive through their comparatively relaxed childrearing practices. This significant difference can be demonstrated in their choice of schools, their perception of the values of different academic subjects, and their intentions of submitting children to early childhood education.

Both Mrs. Yu and Mrs. Chung have a strong urge of enrolling their kids to elite Hong Kong Anthropologist. Vol. 8, 2016

schools, or in their words, "good schools" in Hong Kong. Mrs. Yu voiced out her previous struggle on the choice of schools for Natalie. She sought many advices from her siblings, colleagues and friends on the matter of whether she should submit Natalie to local elite schools or international schools in Hong Kong. After weighing the benefits and drawbacks of the two choices, she decided to enroll Natalie to her present school, a traditional branded local school, because she thought this could enhance Natalie's Chinese Language capability and ultimately, her competitiveness in the local job market in the future.

Likewise, Mrs. Chung enrolled Colin to a very elite school in Hong Kong, Diocesan Boys' School (DBS), with the school's "one dragon system" being a major reason. One Dragon System of primary schools indicates that almost 90% of its students will be promoted to its secondary school section. In other words, Mrs. Chung could be quite sure that Colin will be enrolled in an elite secondary school in his near future, releasing her worries and pressure on the competition for elite secondary schools. In the case of Mrs. Chung, her choice was also attributed to the abundant resources and opportunities the school offers to its students. She believes that the elite school can dig out Colin's talents and invest resources in him, providing lots of opportunities and exposure, at the same time, encouraging him to compete and perform in public. This training is again preparing Colin to win in tremendous competitions in the future. During the interview, Mrs. Chung described the DBS spirit as the "Chinese Olympic Spirit", meaning that only the first place in a competition is worthwhile. She explained the DBS spirit with the distinct reactions of teachers to Colin after the two speech festivals. Colin was awarded the third place in the previous year's Hong Kong English Speech Festival. His teachers paid almost no attention to his good news. However, when Colin won the first place of the same festival this year,

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his teachers were so happy and praised him a lot, encouraging him to join again next year and saying that they were proud of him. Mrs. Chung felt that there was a clear contrast in the two situations, understanding that DBS only values the best and the winners in competitions.

For the Danish informants, they showed me a confused face when I mentioned the foreign term "elite schools" to them during the interviews. They did not know whether there is a hierarchy of schools in Denmark. They simply enroll their kids to the school that is not far from their house. They never fight or compete for an "elite school". This can be partly attributed to the Danish education policy that every student can get into universities, as such, Danish parents do not have to worry that their children might be denied the chance to pursue tertiary education. Mrs. Nielsen expressed that academic achievement of a school does not really matter to her that much. Rather, she wants the school to develop a healthy mindset in him and inspire him to be a dream-maker.

Mrs. Sandahl shared her interesting encounter with a pair of Chinese parents who just moved into her district few months ago. She told me she actually felt very strange when she realized that the Chinese parents' intention of moving in was to increase their daughter's chance of getting into the school which is located in the district. "the school has groomed a lot of famous Chief Executive Officers, lawyers and engineers, is this school what you called as elite school?" asked she. "Yes". I answered. "Popular alumni can be one of the indicators as it proves that the school has the ability to nurture great leaders with real talents and charisma."

To Mrs. Sandahl, moving into the district where the best school is located is an exaggerating, irrational and abnormal act; however, to middle-class parents in Hong Kong, this is considered as a "normal" act. Less than ten years ago, Hong Kong

people were often bombarded with news concerning parents moving into certain expensive districts in the hopes of enrolling their children in elite primary schools or even kindergartens; for now, this kind of news have already disappeared as it is currently a normalized behavior.

Their different aims of their childrearing practices can be deployed by the distinct values of academic subjects perceived by parents in the two contexts. In Mrs. Chung's case in Hong Kong, after she found out Colin failed in Physical Education, she told him: "No problem. It's not a big deal. P.E. is not important. It's fine as long as you do not fail in academic subjects."

Mrs. Chung does not treat physical education as an important subject of learning because it has no direct linkage to Colin's competitiveness in public examinations. She is concerned solely in Colin's performance in academic subjects such as Chinese, English and Mathematics – subjects regarded as essential.

Contrary to Mrs. Chung, Mrs. Nielsen in Denmark sees sports as an important subject for Michael. During dinner time, when Michael shared his memorable moments of being praised by teacher in physical education class, Mrs. Nielsen would encourage him to join more football practices and keep up with his learning progress in sports. Mrs. Nielsen disagreed that students should only focus on education, she perceived sports as a beneficial and inspiring activity that can foster socialization, cohesion and self-esteem.

When I asked the parents in the two contexts to comment on the famous Chinese saying "winning at the starting line", the answers of the Yu's and the Chung's were affirmative while those offered by Mrs. Sandahl, Mrs. Funch and Mrs. Nielsen were negative. To the former group of parents, success very much depends on early cultivation of children. As Mrs. Chung said: "If there is a good beginning of his

education, he will enjoy a smoother road to success in the future. Of course we as parents have to continuously cultivate him and enhance his competitiveness."

For the latter group of parents, some of them asked me back the question "what defines success?" and some of them provided definitions of success such as "being happy for who I am and what I already had." and "stay healthy, feeling loved and giving out love at the same time", definitions which are less "concrete" than those provided by Hong Kong parents. In my Danish informants' perspectives, there is no such thing as "winning at the starting line" as they do not have the concept that life is filled with competitions. They do not see winning as that important in their comparatively much less competitive education context. On top of that, their different stance on the saying is embodied in their intentions of enrolling kids in early childhood education.

All 6 pairs of parents from both contexts enrolled their children in preschools; however, their main intentions differ. For the Hong Kong parents, besides helping children to adapt to a group education environment and equipping them with interpersonal skills, submitting their kids into early childhood education is perceived as a useful way to increase the children's chance of getting into elite schools. For Danish parents, they mainly treat preschools as day nursery as they encounter difficulty in allocating time to look after children. Unlike Hong Kong parents who are drawn to the practice of hiring domestic workers to take care of their children, the Danish parents send their toddlers to preschools.

In Hong Kong, the Yu's, same as the other two families, arranged early schooling for their children by sending them to playgroups before entering kindergarten. Playgroups are a kind of newly established education institution in Hong Kong, aiming at developing toddlers' communication skills by adopting the

westernized free-range teaching style. Playgroups' popularity can be partly attributed to their students' high chance of promoting to elite kindergartens in Hong Kong. Natalie attended her first playgroup when she was one-year-old. It was a playgroup which taught her gymnastics. Mr. Yu expressed in the interview that he and Mrs. Yu thought it would be beneficial to her muscles development. When I asked for any other playgroup Natalie had attended, Mr. Yu surprised me by taking out a large pile of documents which are records of playgroups Natalie had attended in four years of time. They are listed in the following table:

Age	Playgroup
1	My Kiddy Gym to learn Gymnastics
3	Kids Gallery to learn Drama
4	E.nopi to learn Mathematics
3-4	SDM Jazz & Ballet Academie to learn dancing
3-5	Jolly Faith Learning Centre to take English Phonics Course
4-5	Yip's Children's Choral & Performing Arts Centre to attend music lessons

Mr. Yu demonstrated his difficulty in remembering the number and the types of playgroups he had applied for Natalie. He spent so much money and time into cultivating Natalie because he strongly believed that: "Childhood is the most important period for kids to find out their interests and talents, After that they can concentrate on developing them. Knowing their talents at a very young age shortens children's time in finding their correct focus in life." Mr. Yu's desire to discover Natalie's talents as soon as possible, made him allocate more resources into cultivating her in the "correct" path in life clearly, thus embodying the logic of optimization of early Hong Kong Anthropologist. Vol. 8, 2016

childhood development. To Mrs. Yu, it would be the best if Natalie could optimize her talents as early as she could so that she could thrive in her gifted fields and outcompete the others. This optimization is again directed towards winning in competitions. In Mr. Yu's point of view, the "correct" path for Natalie is the one that allows her to survive in competitions and end up being the brightest among all contestants.

In the Danish context, Mr. and Mrs. Funch enrolled Maja in vuggestue (Danish playgroup) from 1 to 3 years old, not only because they treated it as a nursery, but also due to the benefits this playing experience can bring to Maja. They believe vuggestue can spark Maja's interests in socializing with other kids, teach her politeness and inculcate positive values such as resilience, bringing benefits to their psychological development and inspiring them to be a good person. Rather than focusing on outcompeting the others and triumphing in competitions, the Danish childrearing methods are emphasizing more on developing sociality and inspiring children with different possibilities.

Different Choices of Bedtime Stories

Ethical values are being transmitted from middle-class parents to children through bedtime stories. Aside from reinforcing parent-child intimacy, reading stories to kids nourish children's ability to empathize and develop a sense of compassion in them. This unintentional transmission of ethical values encourages children to put themselves into somebody's shoes through imagining themselves to be the story's main character, encountering his obstacles and experiencing his emotions. During my research, I discovered that my groups of Hong Kong parents and Danish parents have difference choices of bedtime stories for their kids. These choices illustrate the

distinct implicit values the parents are trying to disseminate to their children.

For parents from Hong Kong, they would read stories that end with happy endings, or even informational books that cannot be categorized as "stories" to their kids before they sleep; for Danish parents, they would often pick tragedies, stories that end with sad endings as bedtime stories for their children.

To Mrs. Yu, story-telling is a one-way transmission of positive values. She would explicitly highlight all the good deeds of the story characters, clearly explain the reasons behind their popularity and encourage Natalie to follow suit. One example would be: "You should appreciate and praise others more so you will have many friends like Sally (the female protagonist in the story) does!" Natalie usually nods after listening to her mother's teaching. This learning from the exemplary character delineates the method of modeling, which is a preferred way to educate the young and to govern the society (Kuan 2015:63). Mrs. Yu wishes Natalie could learn from the "carriers" of influence (Bakken 2000: 157) and exemplify their positive values in daily life.

When it comes to discussing the villains of the stories, Mrs. Yu would persuade Natalie not to have negative values in mind: "Jealousy is negative and bad for us. One should not do such things using any kind of bad means." Natalie does not only learn the positive and negative values Mrs. Yu has verbalized to her, she develops a sense of compassion and understands that characters or other people have feelings too. Interestingly, from what I have observed so far, Mrs. Yu only read stories with happy endings to Natalie, in other words, stories where heroes or protagonists have a happy ending while villains or antagonists have a miserable end.

The same occurs in the Kwong's, where Mrs. Kwong always tells Disneyland princess stories to Megan. Comparing to Mrs. Yu, Mrs. Kwong adopts a more

emotional tone while reading stories to Megan, in order to make the stories sound more interesting. She desires to engage Megan more into the stories and trigger her reactions and responses in this intimate interactional process. In the everyday storytelling experience, Megan learns to be more responsive and compassionate at the same time. She is taught to take the others' feelings into account before giving out responses. Thus, parents reading storybooks to children can indeed shape children's behaviors in life.

For Mrs. Chung, other than storybooks that end up with happy endings, she would even read different types of encyclopedia to Colin. To Mrs. Chung's encyclopedia can directly enrich Colin's knowledge on various categories in life, such as cultures, plants, and cars. At the same time, developing a habit of reading encyclopedia would predispose Colin to succeed in the competitive and information-based Hong Kong society which rewards people with high levels of literacy and practical knowledge. Besides, Mrs. Chung's desire to engage Colin with more practical information rather than humanistic values may suggest a gender difference, as demonstrated by the different choice of bedtime reading materials.

For the three pairs of Danish parents, coincidentally they all chose the original fairytales written by Hans Christian Andersen, the famous Danish writer whose popularity is not limited to children, but also people from all the other ages. In the midst of my fieldwork in the Sandahl's, I became very interested to read all the fairytales written by Hans Christian Andersen. This encouraged me to go all the way to Odense, Andersen's hometown, to purchase the 1183-paged *The Complete Fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen*. I discovered that his "fairytales" very much contradict with our understanding of fairytales. The stories do not have a happy ending at all. The well-known story of "The Little Mermaid" does not match Walt

Disney's version of the mermaid who ends up with the prince eventually and living together happily ever after, instead, she turns into the sea foam from sadness (Andersen 2006). Andersen did not give further comments on how one should behave. His stories require readers to think further and come up with their personal conclusions and judgments. Mrs. Funch believes that she should discuss tragedies and upsetting events with Maja too as they allow Maja to learn more about sufferings and the factors that triggered all kinds of unhappiness. To Mrs. Funch, "It is important to examine all parts of life. Reading tragedies to Maja increases her empathy level and creates a deeper respect for humanity in her. After all, we all have to come across with bad and uncomfortable emotions in life. Learning these from stories even enhance Maja's resilience."

Similar to Mrs. Kwong, the three pairs of Danish parents all try to engage their children more in the storytelling activity by asking them questions related to the storyline and the characters' emotional stages. To them, storytelling is an interactive process between parents and children that strengthens their relationships

Both cultural groups of informants tend to transmit ethical values through the medium of bedtime story-telling; yet, Hong Kong parents are drawn to pick stories with happy endings while Danish parents are driven to use stories with sad endings. Hong Kong parents prefer happy endings as ethical values are always highlighted in stories ending with a positive outcome. They can always easily teach their children with models, who are usually the protagonists who end up merrily; On the other hand, the Danish parents favor telling tragedies which do not explicitly tell children how to behave as they would like their kids to develop resilience as well as their own perception.

The Use of Praise to build Confidence VS. Self-Esteem

Throughout my fieldwork in the Hong Kong households, I can always hear praises for children. Contrastingly, I can seldom hear phrases such as "very good", "good job" and "my girl/boy, you are so smart" in the Danish households. Referring to the answers given by parents for the interview question on "How do you see praise for children?", the common keyword for Hong Kong parents is "self-confidence" while that of Danish parents is "self-esteem". When the Hong Kong informants mentioned about boosting self-confidence through praises, they are implying belief in one's ability to succeed. It is again directed towards competitions in life. For Danish parents, they elaborated on their concept of self-esteem as an overall subjective and reflexive emotional evaluation of oneself, involving the process of self-judgment.

In the Yu household, both Mr. and Mrs. Yu frequently compliment Natalie in the hopes of boosting her confidence. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Yu would praise Natalie every time she practiced singing for the coming singing competition. They would clap their hands loudly and give her kisses afterwards. Also, whenever Natalie follows Mrs. Yu's order to eat supplements before she sleeps, Mrs. Yu would compliment her by saying: "You are a very good girl, Natalie!" Delighted by the compliments, Natalie finds them necessary upon finishing certain tasks required by her parents. There was one night when Mrs. Yu was really stressed after overtime work in university, she forgot to praise Natalie for her obedience of eating supplements. Natalie immediately questioned with a concerned face: "Why don't you praise me, Mom?" After excessive praises on certain behaviors, Natalie became very dependent on compliments.

For Mrs. Kwong, she often employs praise as an encouragement or a motivation for Megan to finish her homework. She always compliments Megan after

she gives the correct answers for homework. Upon finishing all her homework, Mrs. Kwong would always say: "Well done! Megan. You have finished all your homework! You are such a good girl!" Captivated by compliments from her parents, Megan always longs for praises and tries to gain approval from the others after finishing certain tasks such as assembling puzzles.

Mrs. Sandahl clearly states her disapproval towards excessive praises on children. She tries not to overload Julie with compliments because she thinks it will increase insecurity in Julie. "Using praise to build confidence instead of self-esteem in children will set them up for more stress in the long run." said Mrs. Sandahl.

Mrs. Funch and Mrs. Nielsen also expressed their distaste on giving empty praises for insignificant accomplishments of children, as this could develop their kids into boastful rather than humble human beings. They do not want their children's self-image to be so tied up in scores and become very afraid to admit failures in life. Mrs. Nielsen insisted that: "Praise is quality, not quantity." The only time I saw Mrs. Nielsen praising Michael was the time when Michael automatically cleaned up the dinner table for his parents. The compliment was not an explicit one: "Thanks Mike. I really appreciate your effort in this" Michael answered with a humble smile. It should be highlighted that this statement of praise is not about the child's identity; instead, it is directed towards an actual action the child has performed.

To my Danish informants, it is always the children's actual actions instead of their essential identity that matters. Their praise is more focused on the efforts of children rather than their individuality. This goes in accordance with their aim of building a strong self-esteem rather than self-confidence in children. To my Hong Kong informants, boosting children's self-confidence is the major goal of their praises, as the strong belief in oneself is essential for children to win in their coming

overwhelming number of social competitions.

Conclusion

As illustrated in the above analysis, in the present globalized world, the Hong Kong and Denmark parents adopt seemingly similar child-rearing methods on the surface; yet, their nurturing practices consist of subtle underlying differences. In Hong Kong, the competitive city which tops the ranking of countries with the biggest gaps between the rich and the poor (Bloomberg business 2015), a majority of the parents practice intensive rearing of children, in hopes of securing their children's future career path; Danish parents, on the other hand, generally prefer the "natural growth" of children (Lareau 2003). They allow more playtime for their children to freely develop themselves. The distinction between the two child-rearing methods is attributed to the differences in the environment and beliefs of the two societies.

The competitive and hierarchical environment of Hong Kong plays a vital role in promoting intensive child-rearing. In Hong Kong, success is largely or even solely defined by career. The easiest way to gain a socially recognized career is through education. Owing to the limited places of elite schools in Hong Kong, parents would not hesitate to increase their children's competitiveness by submitting their kids into early childhood education, and investing large sums of money into their extra-curricular activities. In other words, Hong Kong parents maximize their children's time for education and minimize their time for free-play due to the dominance of fierce competitions in Hong Kong society.

In Denmark, a welfare state which advocates equality among people (Sjørøsløv 2011:80), success is defined by happiness in all aspects of life. The idea that true happiness does not come only from a good education contributes to the discrepancy

between the Danish and the Hong Kong way of parenting. This distinction in the dominant societal beliefs explains why Danish parents do not over-emphasize education or extra-curricular activities of their children, but rather stress on their whole psychological development. They want their children to acquire socialization skills, build up self-esteem and learn cohesion democracy, by encouraging them to play more, instead of starting education at a very young age. Nevertheless, before we romanticize the Danish welfare state, we should keep our eyes open to the Danish public complaints about high taxes, the Danish government's misuses of the taxes of its people, and the underlying exclusion of immigrants (Sjørøsløv 2011:88), far-reaching factors that might be exerting increased influence in the Danish childrearing methods.

Both Hong Kong and Danish parents try their best to make their children happy; however, they adopt intrinsically different ways to achieve the same goal. During my interview with Mr. Yu, one of my Hong Kong informants, he confessed that he spent so much money and time on cultivating his 4-year-old daughter because he strongly believed that childhood is the most important period for kids to find out their interests and talents. After that, kids can concentrate on developing their gifts. To Hong Kong parents, the optimization of childhood allows for children to shorten their time in searching for their area of devotion in life. For Danish parents, play is a key element in the long-term well-being and success of their kids. To them, the more their children play, the more resilient and socially adept they will become in the long run.

Both the intensive rearing and natural growth of kids are adopted for the sake of children's future happiness. The differences between the two methods demonstrate that social scientists should not make any judgment beforehand; they should always take historical context into consideration if they want to fully understand the distinct

childrearing approaches. Nonetheless, although the socio-cultural environment pushes the parents to conform to the norms of how they should raise their kids, even the most marginalized parents who find themselves in very constrained circumstances are not necessarily victims, as they can always find a way to create meanings in their life.

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