

**Title: East Asian mothers' attitudes towards their children's education in
England: dialectics of East Asian and English education**

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Abstract

This study explores how middle-class migrant East Asian mothers approach their children's education in England, where educational culture is *perceived* to be considerably different from East Asia. Based on dichotomous perceptions about East Asian and English education cultures, dialectical perspectives were used to analyse the life history interview data, particularly four dialectical frameworks developed by Baxter (1990): selection, separation, neutralisation, and reframing. In order to release tensions arising from the two-perceived different educational systems these mothers used different dialectical strategies. The paper argues that East Asian mothers' behaviour towards their children's education cannot be categorised using a uniform cultural framework and a diasporic space provides multiple possibilities for exercising divergent approaches for them.

key words

Confucianism, dialectical frameworks, Diasporic spaces, East Asian and English education, mothering

Introduction

Diasporic spaces can provide possibilities for creating counter or alternative narratives among migrants by challenging the dominant cultural forces of 'home' and the host society (Shrazi, 2019). Education operates as a locus where gendered, classed and racialised constructions are reproduced and negotiated (Byrne & De Tona, 2012). For many immigrant families, education is seen as having vital importance in achieving upward social mobility against their disadvantaged social positions in the host society (Byrne & De Tona, 2012). In this the role of mothers among immigrant families is particularly important in ensuring the academic achievement of their children, together with transmitting the cultural values of their 'home' country to them (Durand, 2011).

The highly gendered practice around children's education is also commonly found in East Asian countries where it holds particular importance (Chang, 2010), as indicated by the term 'education fever' (Kipnis, 2011). Education fever refers to 'the strong zeal for education' (Lee, 2017, p. 2), which stems from the belief that education is the sole channel of social mobility (Sharma, 2013). It is principally mothers in these countries who are directly involved in children's education through the organisation of private tutoring and supervision of homework, encapsulated in such a term as '*Kyoiku mama*' (education mother) (Yusmaridi et al., 2021). Although these countries have clearly developed divergent educational systems and cultures as well as heterogeneous degrees of 'educational fever', one common educational feature that they share is the prevalence of 'shadow education', i.e., private supplementary education outside schools, such as private tutoring and 'cram' schools (Zhang & Bray, 2020). Anderson & Kohler (2013) stated that over seventy five percent of Korean children received private education. In parallel with this, Bray (2009) reported that more than 65 per cent of Japanese ninth-grade students attend the Japanese version of a 'cram' school, *Juku*. Consistent with these, in China up to 137 million children attend cram schools and the supplementary

education market is estimated to be worth 800 billion yuan (£90 billion) a year (Tang, 2018). Scholars have explicated that the active educational involvement of parents originates from the nexus between the importance of education and the family rooted in Confucianism, in which children's high academic achievement is seen as the success of the whole family (Choi & Nieminen, 2013; Kipnis, 2011; Lee, 2017). The combination of the economic value of educational achievement for children's future life with family success motivates parents to invest heavily in their children's education (Kim, 2015).

The literature examining education of East Asian migrants in developed Western societies is highly divided. On the one hand, some scholars have highlighted the contribution of culturally transmitted values and behaviour towards education (Chen, 2001; Choi & Nieminen, 2013; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). On the other hand, others have challenged the cultural explanation as essentialising ethnic cultures, masking individual variations and overlooking other factors that influence the educational behaviours of East Asian migrants (Ho, 2017, 2020; Lee & Zhou, 2017; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Watkins, Ho & Butler, 2017). From the cultural perspectives, East Asian migrants' educational attitudes and behaviours are often represented as considerably different from those of Western countries, such as USA and UK. For instance, Chen (2001), drawing on her comparative study of parents' role in science education between Chinese, Chinese-American and American students, pointed out notable differences between American and Chinese educational cultures, consisting of almost opposing characteristics (e.g. in America practical knowledge is prioritised, whereas in China high value is placed on textbook knowledge). Her data suggested Chinese parents had higher expectations for their children's educational performance, with a strong belief in their intellectual ability, and spent considerably more time and energy helping their children's study than their American counterparts (Chen, 2001). In line with this, Woodrow & Sham's (2001) research in Greater Manchester schools in England underscored the differences in attitudes

towards learning between British-Chinese and British-European pupils. Their findings suggested that, despite the majority of their British-Chinese respondents being born and educated in England, their attitudes towards education were strongly influenced by traditional Chinese cultural beliefs – especially respect for seniors and filial piety. For example, pleasing their parents was reported to have been of high importance to British-Chinese pupils, much more so than their British-European counterparts.

By contrast, numerous scholars have criticised the monochromic cultural lens. Ho (2020) argued that the academic success of Asian migrants in Australia (e.g., Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean) should be understood in association with multiple factors, such as aspiration and anxiety as migrants situated in the neoliberal policy context. Ho maintained that migrants' aspirations are closely associated with 'educational desire' as a vital means of upward social mobility. In conjunction with this, high investment in their children's education is driven by their anxiety to establish new life in the host society as minorities as well as anxiety about racial discrimination and its impact on their children's future. Moreover, Ho (2020) suggested that the academic success of Asian migrants is linked to their class position. The Australian government's migration policy since the mid-1990s selectively allows highly educated individuals with economic security to enter Australia and has had a subsequent impact on the educational outcomes of migrants' children. In a similar vein, Lee & Zhou (2017), disputing the credibility of the cultural explanation, especially the role of Confucianism, emphasised the effect of the hyper-selective migration policy of the USA since 1995 on the noticeable educational success of Asian Americans (Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean). According to Lee & Zhou, this hyper-selectivity has had a spill-over effect to lower class Asian migrants through the transmission of ethnic capital within their migrant communities, alleviating the overall academic performance of these groups. The work of Watkins, Ho & Butler (2017) is also in chime with the above studies in their claims on the cluster of divergent

factors contributing to the educational success of Asian migrants in Australia, UK, USA & Canada. Furthermore, Watkins, Ho & Butler pointed out the potential danger of dichotomous conceptualisation of ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ educational beliefs and practices, consonant with Huntington’s claim on the ‘cultural clash’ between West and East which disregards diversity and heterogeneity within and between social groups.

Whilst there are a few studies around Chinese immigrants in England (e.g., Francis et al., 2017; Gates & Guo, 2014; Wei, 2011), little is known about the education of Japanese and Koreans in England, particularly mothers’ experiences. My data suggest East Asian mothers viewed ‘East Asian’ and ‘English’ education as starkly different. Based on this *perceived* difference, this paper uses a dialectical framework proposed by Baxter (1990) to examine how first-generation Chinese, Japanese and Korean mothers approach their children’s education within the context where divergent educational cultures and methods coexist. Through this, the paper aims to explore possible tensions experienced by migrant individuals within the host society, how they deal with such tensions, as well as highlighting the varied strategies of their adjustment processes. The paper argues that East Asian mothers’ approaches to their children’s education cannot be pigeonholed into a monolithic cultural framework and a diasporic space provides multiple possibilities for exercising divergent educational practices for their children.

Education in England

Existing literature has indicated that English education is highly divided by class and ‘race’ (Ball et al., 1995; Kirby, 2016; Pilkington, 2003). For instance, Ball et al. (1995), drawing on their interview data with parents of year six children in urban England, highlighted that there were recognisable differences between middle-class and working-class parents in the way they engaged with their children’s education due to divergence in their economic and cultural capitals. Ball et al. claimed that their middle-class respondents were long-term planners in their children’s education, who had visions for their children’s future education and career. In

comparison, their working-class counterparts' approaches to their children's education were rather 'contingent', often driven by immediate and practical family demands, alongside familial and geographical constraints (Ball et al., 1995, p. 57). In addition, Kirby (2016) noted the increasing popularity of private tuition, especially among privately-educated students and children of better-off families. Vincent & Ball (2007) similarly claimed the increasing popularity of 'enrichment activities' for children is a relatively recent phenomenon in England, which is highly class specific (the professional middle-class). Building on Lareau's (2003) notion of 'concerted cultivation' for middle-class parenting, Vincent and Maxwell (2016) suggested middle-class parents (especially mothers) in their research were involved in the organisation of various carefully planned extra-curricular enrichment activities for their children. Vincent and Maxwell argued that it reflects the central tenet of neoliberal individualism in Britain since the 1980s, which forces parents to take a proactive role in helping the construction of their children's life, resulting in the intensification of parenting, especially mothering.

Divergence in English education is not only found between classes but also between different 'races' and ethnicities. Pilkington (2003) pointed out that ethnic backgrounds have intersecting influences in determining educational outcomes for students with heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds. Among others, Chinese students in general were identified as high academic achievers, even more so than general white students (Pilkington, 2003). Vincent et al. (2012) also maintained that 'race' intersects with class in shaping educational experiences and outcomes for students. The black parents in their study were highly involved in their children's education, actively organising and managing a range of outside school lessons and activities. Vincent et al. (2012, p. 432) maintained that middle-class black parents in their study had an acute awareness of their racially disadvantaged position and its potential impact on their children's future. Therefore, education, accompanied by extra-curricular activities, became an

important medium through which they protected their children against racism (Vincent et al., 2012). Resonating with this to some extent, the report by Kirby (2016) indicated that ethnic minority students are more likely to receive private tuition than white pupils: approximately 41 per cent of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) pupils aged 11-16 received private tuition, compared to 21 per cent of white pupils in 2015. Kirby suggested that cultural differences between groups are a possible explanation, with BME families placing a higher premium on education.

Dialectical Frameworks

Historically, East Asia has been regarded to have developed different cultural traditions from Western countries, such as Britain, as a result of formulating 'different systems of thought', influenced by divergent geographical and socio-political environments (Nisbett, 2005, p. xvi), especially in the way individuals understand the self and its relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Existing literature has suggested that, whilst Asian cultures put more emphasis on communitarian values founded on relatedness with others, Western cultures place more value on individualism based on independence from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Particularly, in the Confucianism which originates from ancient China, there is a stress on the interrelatedness between individuals and this has played a significant part in shaping cultural beliefs and practices in East Asia (Ebrey, Walthall & Palais, 2006). Dissimilar to Western countries, such as England and USA, where childrearing is said to be founded on the value of individualism, autonomy, freedom and happiness (Hays, 1996), in Confucian East Asia it is based on the ideals of hierarchical human relationships, communitarianism, obedience to parents/seniors, and hard work (Inoguchi & Shin, 2009). Supporting this view, the research of Chao & Tseng (2002) highlighted differences between East Asian immigrant mothers and American mothers in their parenting style. For instance, Chinese mothers put emphasis on relational goals of nurturing close and enduring parent-child relationships, whereas

European/American mothers put emphasis on individual goals, such as cultivating children's self-esteem. This divergence in culture can have significant implications for educational practices. In similar vein, Yi-yi (2016) highlighted heterogeneity between Chinese and UK education: whilst the UK's educational system is centred around developing independent thinking, the Chinese system encourages learning by rote and obedience to teachers in the classroom. As such, these studies see the educational norms and practices of East Asia and England as dialectically different.

However, it is worthwhile to note that the dichotomous view between East Asia and Western countries tends to be held within psychology. By contrast, sociological and cultural studies have highlighted a more complex picture in this debate, questioning the simplistic approaches. For instance, Ryan & Louie (2007) took a highly critical stance on the dichotomous approach. They argued that the binary depiction of 'Western' and 'Eastern' scholarship, such as 'deep/surface' and 'dependent/independent' learning, misrepresents diverse educational philosophies and practices within and between different educational structures. According to Ryan and Louie, such binary construct is based on a false assumption that a particular system of education can be characterised by clearly defined attributes, such as the critical thinking and independent learning that are regarded as key attributes of the 'West'. In practice, however, these characteristics are not unique to the 'West' and can also be found among students from non-Western countries. In addition, the meanings of such terms are contested and open to different interpretations, depending on the context and who applies them in their educational practice. Therefore, Ryan and Louie maintain that the binary approach engenders a danger in lumping together individuals in a homogenous manner without deeply fathoming their heterogeneous experiences. Similar concerns are found in the work of Ang (2014) in her critical evaluation of 'Chinese groupism', which pointed out the flaws of categorising Chinese in Australia as a uniform group with identifiable commonalities, despite

a wide range of variations within them. Ang claimed that this groupism operates as a principal mechanism of exclusionary and discriminatory practice by continually treating minority individuals as outsiders. Consistent with this argument, cultures are not unitary and fixed social entities.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996, p. 3) claim that social life is messy, complex and disorderly, and the aim of social scientific enquiry should focus on fathoming such messiness and complexity, rather than seeking to iron it out. According to Baxter & Montgomery (1996, p. 160), dialectical perspectives enable us to explore the fuzzy, fluid and contradictory experience of people and recognise 'the multivocality of social existence'. Lenin (1913) described the essence of dialectics as 'the recognition of the contradictory, mutually exclusive, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature, including mind and society' (cited in Conforth, 1961, p. 69). Hence, from dialectical perspectives social life is regarded as being comprised of dynamically opposing components, which ceaselessly clash and conflict, yet simultaneously influence each other (Murphy, 1971). In this sense, these opposing elements are not static and opposites in parallel (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) but 'being in a fluid state, in motion', interacting with each other (Marx, 1977, p. 103).

Baxter (1990) proposed four dialectical frameworks in her examination of relationships, predicated upon Bakhtin's dialogism (1981). Unlike Hegelian-Marxian dialectics, in which a dialectical interaction between two opposing forces (thesis-antithesis) is viewed as culminating in a teleological end (synthesis) (Conforth, 1961), Bakhtin treated dialectics as an open-ended and ongoing process, in which multiple constituents interplay in a constant flux. In this process there might be moments when competing elements come together and create unity; however, Bakhtin suggested that such moments are temporary, not permanent (Baxter, 1990). Hence, even if dialectical tensions might appear to be 'resolved' through the application of different strategies, it should be considered as momentary settlement. In this

sense, social life can be regarded as involving incessant interaction between stability and change (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Likewise, the experiences of first generation East Asian mothers who have moved to a different cultural milieu are likely to entail ‘a complex and shifting process of continuity and change’ throughout their life in England (Schneider, 1997, p. 497).

Baxter’s (1990) four frameworks are: (1) Selection - trying to ‘transcend’ the perceived contradictions by selecting one option over the other (e.g. select ‘regimented style’ education over ‘liberal’ or vice versa); (2) Separation - separating the two competing components and enacting each in its full intensity, temporarily or spatially (e.g. adopt a ‘liberal style’ when they are younger and a ‘regimented style’ when they get older); (3) Neutralisation – neutralising tensions through compromise of both elements (e.g. employ some aspects of both ‘regimented’ and ‘liberal’ styles of education but without fully satisfying either); (4) Reframing – transformation of meaning through reinterpretation and redefinition and thus the two components are no longer seen as conflicting (e.g. reconceptualising ‘the liberal style’ and ‘the regimented style’ as complementary, rather than conflicting and contradictory, therefore the combination of the two is seen as enabling mothers to achieve ‘the best of both worlds’).

Methodsⁱ

Samples

This study is drawn from the individual narrative interview data of 30 East Asian migrant mothers (10 Chinese, 10 Japanese, 10 Korean,) in England with dependent children. All the children at school age attended mainstream UK state or private schools. One mother from Japan (Nanako) received secondary education in Britain, and the rest of the participants were schooled in their own countries.

Regarding the participants’ financial situations, women in ‘the regimented style’ tended

to have a higher level of household income, compared to the other groups. Four out of eight had a household income over £60,000 with two over £80,000, although one had less than £20,000. This is indicative of their financial capacity to invest more in their children's education than others. Educational levels of this group are also notably high, especially compared to those who belong to 'the liberal style' of education. All eight women achieved at least degree level education with five of them having obtained Master's degrees and one with a PhD.

Mothers in the category of 'the liberal style' of education tended to have comparatively lower household incomes than those in 'the regimented style'. Dissimilar to the latter, nobody in this group had household income more than £60,000, with three between £50,000-60,000, and four £20,000-40,000. Their educational levels are also comparatively lower than the latter group. Three out of seven achieved below degree level education although four participants gained Bachelor's degrees.

One participant in 'neutralisation' was educated at a degree level yet their household income was below £20,000, which indicates likely financial constraints in her ability to invest in her children's education.

For the 'reframing' group, their household incomes varied from one with over £80,000, three £50,000-60,000, and four £20,000-40,000. Whilst the general educational level of this group is high, the range of final qualifications are more widely spread than the rest, with one PhD, four Master's, seven Bachelor's, and two diplomas.

All the Korean participants resided in or within the vicinity of New Malden, known as a Korean town due to the settlement of a large Korean population. Most of the Chinese participants lived in Southampton, which has diverse ethnic communities, including a large Chinese community. The majority of the Japanese participants resided in suburban areas of London, such as Harrow, which also has a large Japanese population. However, the geographic

locations of Japanese interviewees were more diverse than the other groups. All the participants who married to 1st generation East Asian men spoke their mother tongue at home with their children. Those who were married to British used a mixture of English and their mother tongue (see Table 1, 2, 3 & 4 for details).

[Tables here]

Recruitment

East Asians constitute a relatively small population in Britain and Chinese is the only officially recognised group in the census. Therefore, more systematic sampling was not possible using the official data. In order to offset difficulties with the sampling, the researcher identified key ethnic communities in Southern England. For the recruitment of Koreans, I visited hairdressers' and cafes in New Malden, where many Korean mothers were likely to go, with leaflets briefly outlining my research project as well as contact details. In addition, I visited a private pre-/after-school institution where mothers would come to pick up their children when they finish their lessons. For the sampling of a Japanese group, I visited a Japanese school in London, which was comprised of a majority of Japanese expatriates' children. For Chinese, I contacted the chairwoman of the Chinese Association in my local area, who helped me access mothers in the school. Recruitment through these direct visits was combined with the snowballing method.

Interviews

The interview started with asking the respondents to tell their life stories, whichever way they wanted. Then, probing questions were asked in order to explore themes that were not covered by the respondents. These included their experiences of educational beliefs and practices: e.g., to what extent do you think education of your child(dren) is important for their future?; what kinds of extra-curricular activities do your child(ren) do?; what are the advantages and

disadvantages of bringing up your child(dren) in Britain?, The interviews lasted an average of two hours, with some participants having taken over an hour whilst others took over three hours. They took place in various locations, such as participants' homes or workplace, whichever the interviewee preferred.

Data analysis

The interview data was analysed by using the thematic method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and the focus was given to the dominance, repetition and frequency of accounts. In this process different themes around how East Asian mothers dealt with supposedly contradictory educational practices between their country of origin and England emerged, which led me to apply Baxter's (1990) dialectical frameworks. Four dominant themes relating to Baxter's frameworks were: Perceived differences between East Asia and England; Selection; Neutralisation; and Reframing. The next step was to investigate each theme more closely to examine how the women deployed a particular strategy in order to 'resolve' tension between the two perceived educational cultures and approaches as well as to identify the possible links between different biographical factors and their choice of strategy.

Findings

In order to 'resolve' tensions arising from the two supposedly divergent styles, East Asian mothers used selection, neutralisation and reframing strategies. No data however indicates the use of separation in this study.

Perceived differences between East Asia and England

The interview data revealed all the participants perceived that the overall educational environment of England contrasted with that of their 'home' countries, where children have to face high pressure to follow the regimented style of education. For example, the account of Minju illustrates this:

I know it's stressful from childhood in Korea. But, children here have fun at school and fun at home. In Korea children are pushed to study all day and subject to a constant stress but here people don't study like that.

Such a perceived difference between England and their country of origin was also seen as being reflected in a perceived contrast in the attitudes of mothers towards their children. The account of Lucy, who came from China, demonstrates this:

Most English mothers let their children try by themselves, encourage them to be good but not push them. I think that's a very good thing. Many Chinese mothers push their children. Not good. If their children draw a picture, just a few lines, English mothers will say, "Very good! Very beautiful!" (laughs). But Chinese mums will say "Oh, what have you drawn? Just a few lines!" (laughs).

This suggests educational practice in England is *perceived* by East Asian mothers to be like a uniform entity, totally opposite to their exit countries. I suspect the formation of such a perception largely originates from their tight social networks with mothers from the same ethnic heritages, as illuminated by Zhou & Kim (2006) in the role of ethnic networks in the maintenance of cultural heritages and boundary drawing. During the interviews most women often talked about regularly meeting and socialising with mothers from the same country, irrespective of whether they lived in an ethnic enclave or more ethnically diverse areas.

As a result of perceiving children's education in their 'home' country and England as almost two opposite ends of the spectrum, some mothers often experienced a dialectical 'tug' between the two styles, having been pulled towards both concomitantly. This was illustrated in the account of Bian: 'I don't want to give him too much pressure like China, but I also don't want him to too relax now.' In order to tackle these dialectical tensions, East Asian mothers employ different strategies.

However, as discussed previously, English education is not uniform, divided by class and 'race' (Kirby, 2016; Pilkington, 2003; Vincent et al., 2012). Also, in some ways middle-class English educational practices resemble those of East Asian countries, heavily supported by extra-curricular activities and active parental involvement, especially with the strong influence of neoliberal educational policy since the 1980s (Kirby, 2016; Vincent & Ball, 2007; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016). The binary construct by East Asian mothers resonates with exclusionary 'groupism', which reinforces the processes of othering, without critically interrogating its simplistic approach (Ang, 2014).

Selection: either 'regimented way' or 'liberal way'

Fifteen mothers used selection as a way of releasing the dialectical tensions by either taking 'the regimented style' or 'the liberal'.

'Regimented style' education

A minority of accounts (8/30 – 6 Korean, 1 Chinese, 1 Japanese) were evidently suggestive of a strong residue of the allegedly regimented style of education commonly seen as practised in their countries of origin. However, interestingly, the majority of them (7) described the perceived liberal style of education in England positively: 'Educational method here is freer...educational environment is better for the children here' (Heji); 'The school education is freer than Korea so that could be good for the children' (Miri). However, despite this, they were drawn to the regimented style of education due to reasons presented below.

The dominant theme that emerged from these accounts is 'the necessity of private tuition' in order to enhance or often maintain the top performance of their children at school. In relation to this, taking extra lessons in core subjects, such as English and Maths, was described as almost essential, particularly English. Alongside the fact that their children were raised by parents whose mother tongue was not English, the development of formal academic

English skills was seen as not achievable via school education only. This seems to have been a major pulling factor that influenced these women on selecting ‘the regimented style’ over ‘the liberal style’. The reasons why English private lessons were perceived to be necessary were illustrated by Heji. Her five-year-old child was taking six private lessons (English, Maths, French, baseball, football and swimming):

Heji: I personally think English private lessons are not learning speaking although now what he learns is speaking and vocabulary. I mean even for Koreans, speaking Korean doesn't mean that person is good at Korean. Writing well or expressing his opinion clearly and the skills to persuade others in a logical manner are in fact nothing to do with the ability to speak. The long-term purpose is not about speaking English but he can express his opinions properly and write them well. With only classroom education, especially because we mainly use Korean at home...Even British children should learn as we study essay writing separately [in Korea].

From the above it is clear that private lessons were not seen as a tool to help academically less able students; instead, they were described as a means to assist young children in perfecting their academic skills in all areas, thus realising their full potential, similar to those in the study of Ho (2020, p. 48) who used private tuition as a channel ‘to be ahead of everyone’. According to Ho (2020), this represents Asian migrants’ aspiration to succeed and simultaneous anxiety about future life in their host society. Coming from highly competitive and insecure countries, these migrants are well equipped to use the competitive education system to their advantage. This can also be interpreted as part of the ‘concerted cultivation’ practised by middle-class families (Lareau, 2003) in terms of the development of language skills to successfully navigate institutional and professional settings. As migrant parents, they were not able to help their children develop such linguistic skills at home and therefore had to rely on an alternative means of achieving them through formal tuition. This in a way additionally reflects the continuation

of educational obsession in Korea in which the largest proportion of expenditure to GDP is spent on private education (Anderson, 2012). According to Chang (2010, p. 28), the education zeal of families in East Asian countries, including Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, has engendered a collective effect similar to “the social investment state”, which seeks to maintain a knowledge-based economy, relying on a highly skilled workforce. Resonating with this, such high academic aspiration for children was also found in the account of Mai, a mother from Japan. Her children, aged 14, 13, 12 and eight, were also taking private lessons from a company called Gumon, which was founded in Japan and had franchises in other countries, including Britain and Korea. Gumon produces its own exercise books for various subjects, including English and Maths, and offers once a week tutoring to children. The guiding principle of such methods as Gumon is that children learn through everyday repeated practices. Unlike Heji, Mai could not afford for her children to have more private lessons due to her low household income; however, her accounts still showed similar attitudes in terms of viewing private lessons in addition to school education as essential:

Some children learn English as a home language so you need English [lessons]. My oldest child's Maths is better so I thought English is important in any subject so I take him to an English private tutor...I think he is very smart; that's why I want him to be educated a lot...the younger ones have to do Gumon every day, English and Maths. They don't like it.

As noted in the introduction, the use of *Juku* (or supplementary education) is widespread in Japan as a conduit for successful entry into prestigious universities, which is regarded as a vital passage to securing successful careers and future life (Roesgaard, 2006). Although Mai did not specifically mention the ultimate goal of her children's private tuition, it is possible to glean from her account that academic success is treated as a kernel for a successful life. Furthermore, her account suggests the decision towards education was made by her, rather than her children,

as her younger ones were forced to take private lessons to hone their English and Maths, although they did not enjoy doing them. What is striking from these mothers' talk is the absence of, or little priority given to, what children want for themselves. Instead, mothers' views on what is best for their children were treated as central. Similarly, the study of Zhou and Kim (2006) illustrated how second generation Korean and Chinese American children were forced by their parents (especially mothers) to attend private tuition schools and ethnic language schools against their general will. This indicates an unspoken belief that, as long as mothers thought 'an action will do good' (Hua), it was regarded as beneficial for their children.

The contradictions in the above accounts, in terms of viewing the *perceived-to-be* liberal education style in England positively whilst selecting 'the regimented style', could be explained in two ways. First, as discussed above, this could originate from mothers' anxiety over their children getting behind in English, when both parents are of East Asian origin. Second, these mothers were highly conscious of the importance of education for their children's future as immigrants in countervailing racial disadvantages, as exemplified by numerous studies (Ho, 2020; Vincent et al., 2012; Zhou & Kim, 2006), alongside cultural value that places a high premium on education by the BME population in the UK (Francis et al., 2017; Kirby, 2016). As demonstrated by these studies, education was regarded as a vital means through which immigrant mothers could help to secure the successful assimilation of their children into mainstream British society and to gain social position based on their merits, which they as first-generation migrants struggled to achieve:

Mijung: It's always hard for first-generation. Even if you study degrees here and work very hard, you are behind because of language. But when I look at the second-generation they don't have any problems. So everyone [first-generation] lives with the hope for their children's future because it compensates for what first-generation have

lost, not necessarily financially but the social position. So it is inevitable for first-generation to put lots of emphasis on their children's education.

As a result, they were largely drawn to 'the regimented style' so they could equip their children with the best possible academic skills in all subject areas despite their positive perception and portrayal of 'the liberal style' of education. Within this context, the educational success of children was represented as not only for the children but also for the whole family in compensating for the loss of their parents' social position in Britain as immigrants. This additionally indicates the dominance of neoliberal educational policy in Britain (Holmwood, 2014), which encourages parental investment in private education because success or failure is seen as a sole responsibility of individuals with the absence of state support.

This approach was taken most prevalently by mothers from Korea. I suspect that this might be because all my Korean participants resided either in or near New Malden, where Korean culture was relatively well preserved. As Hojin's talk indicates, many Koreans living in New Malden continued to educate their children like their counterparts in Korea. Consonant with this, Zhou & Kim (2006) astutely argued that ethnic communities and their networks play a vital part in the educational experiences of migrant families in interaction with the constellation of their cultural values. Also, there appears to be some connection between the educational behaviours of my participants and the ethnicity of their husbands. For example, the dominant majority of mothers who chose 'the regimented style' were married to men from the same countries of origin, except one whose husband was British. This seems to suggest that having husbands with the same national origin might have contributed to the retention of the *perceived-to-be* dominant form of educational practice in their exit countries. This might also have stemmed from the fact that both husbands and wives were mostly well-educated immigrants who were likely to have high aspirations for their children's future, which drove them to heavy investment in education. However, there seem to be no marked links between

the length of settlement and the continuing use of 'regimented style' education as its variation indicates. Additionally, educational levels of this group were particularly high with five of them having obtained Master's degrees or a PhD. Furthermore, it is worth noting that all but one woman in this category were stay-at-home mothers. Given that the organisation and management of extra-curricular activities demand a high level of parental involvement and time, it is not surprising that most of these mothers 'chose' not to work. As stated in the methods section, mothers in this category also tended to have a higher level of household income with half of them having over £60,000, compared to the other groups, suggesting that their position was linked to their financial ability to pay for expensive extra-curricular lessons.

Resistance to 'the regimented style' of education

Contrary to the above mothers, the accounts of other minority mothers (7/30 – 3 Japanese, 3 Korean, 1 Chinese) showed a strong resistance to the education style of their country of origin, thus selecting child-centred and liberal style education over the regimented methods. For these women, their relocation to England appears to have made them more critical about the general practice in their 'home' countries; being in England allowed them to see things from a different perspective by looking at the very environment where children in England grew up. Moreover, this might be partly due to their own personal experiences of being subject to the strict educational system and the resentment they felt during their childhood and adolescence. However, simultaneously they also experienced tensions arising from the clash between the two different styles. The account of Sook illustrates this: 'I get stressed every time I meet Korean mums and they talk about education.' Sook's story highlights the internal conflicts she underwent every time she met with educationally obsessed Korean mothers. In order to ease such tensions and conflicts the women in this group each made a conscious 'choice' by selecting 'the liberal style' over 'the regimented style', which might also have involved deliberately keeping distance from those who were seen as educationally over-zealous.

According to this view, children's own feelings should be respected in deciding their present and future. Consequently, mothers were positioned as playing a supporting role whilst children had the power to steer the direction of their own future. In this depiction, self-discipline and hard work were less valued than having a happy childhood, free from unnecessary pressure: "I just want my children to be happy" (Lucy); "Children should do what they like" (Sook). These mothers were highly critical about the approach to extra-curricular activities taken by many mothers from their country of origin, in which their own desire tended to override their children's. The account of Hojin also revealed a strong resentment towards the perceived majority of Korean mothers' educational approaches in New Malden. Hojin was running a small Korean restaurant in New Malden, where she witnessed the educational fervour of many Korean mothers on a daily basis:

It's extreme among Korean mothers in terms of taking private lessons...After school, their mothers take them to one lesson, then violin lesson, and then go to a Hagwon like a Korean Hagwon to study Maths and Science. I don't understand why they live here if they do like that. They should be in Korea.

Another dominant theme that emerged among these mothers' accounts was that children should just play. This was evident in the account of Yumi, who believed children of a young age were supposed to spend their childhood playing rather than being fretted around to do work by their mothers. Thus, her talk shows a lot of the sympathy she felt towards children who were pushed to work hard: 'Very sad! They're wasting their childhood. Completely! I feel so sorry for them. A child is a child. They have to have fun and they have to play. That's their nature'. According to Yumi, pressurising children to study is against the 'nature' of children, taking away their rights to play and have fun. In this sense, the position of these mothers can be linked to a development of childhood as a special period that should be protected for their innocence, immune from the ethos of the competitive market (Hays, 1996).

Their homogenous treatment of English education as liberal, built on the ethos of natural development, can be challenged as false. For example, Furedi (2008) described the practice of parenting in contemporary Britain as intense and paranoid. Moreover, some studies have suggested ‘concerted cultivation’ in British middle-class children with carefully chosen extra enrichment activities (Kirby, 2016; Vincent & Ball, 2007; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016), in contrast to the ‘natural growth’ approach deployed by working-class parents in Lareau’s study (2003).

With respect to the connection between the length of settlement and their choice of a ‘liberal style’ education, there appears to be some links, since all of the mothers in this group had lived in England over five years. Also, this group of mothers were relatively less well educated than the other groups, especially compared to ‘the regimented style’ with three out of seven achieving below degree level education. This might suggest the possible link between the mother’s educational level and attitudes towards their children’s education. In addition, this group was less well off than those who adhered to ‘the regimented style’ with heavy investments in private tutoring, as discussed in the method section. This is suggestive of a possible connection between their financial situations and educational practice because of their limited ability to invest financially in children’s education. Furthermore, the husband’s ethnicity seems to have a certain impact on some women’s attitudes in this category since four out of seven women were married to British men. This seems to suggest that having British husbands might have made them question ‘the regimented ways’ *perceived-to-be* prevalent in their ‘home’ countries and change their beliefs and attitudes.

Neutralisation

The accounts of one participant, Minju, showed the use of neutralisation as a strategy to ease tensions by compromising both styles. Minju was a graduate from Korea who had lived in England for 12 years and had three children aged 6, 7 and 8 years old, all of whom went to a

state school. At the time of the interview she was unemployed. Minju married a Korean man and their household income was less than £20,000. Minju did not want to force her children to follow the strict educational regime of Korea:

In Korea parents have to send their children to Hagwon a lot and the environment is so stressful...That's why I don't want to educate my children in Korea...My kids can play at home and visit friends, unlike many Korean children.

As can be seen from this, she made conscious efforts not to be fully absorbed into 'the regimented style' of education. However, her other narratives concomitantly showed the dialectical pull she felt towards 'the regimented style', with continuing emphasis placed on education: 'I believe going to a good school is very important. I think it's laziness for children to go to a low performing school because this means they haven't worked hard when they are supposed to do.' This instantiates her belief in the duties of individuals, specifically children's duty to work hard and obey (Inoguchi & Shin, 2009).

Even if she embraced 'the liberal style' education to some extent and opposed 'the regimented style' to the full scale, her following account also indicated her regret at not being able to afford to give her children private tuition: 'If I had money, I would like to send my children to *Hagwon*, not too much, but I think it would be good for them to get English lessons, especially from 11 plus...' As exemplified in this, Minju's stories clearly show the dialectical tensions she encountered. In addition, her account illustrates the enhanced desire for private lessons as her children grow older, demonstrating possible shifts in mothers' attitudes towards their children's education at different stages of their life. This further indicates the possible impact of the financial situation on her behaviour towards her children's education. Baxter (1990) suggested unsatisfactory feelings experienced by those who have used neutralisation. Consistent with this, Minju appears not to have felt a sense of 'resolution' in her 'choice'.

Reframing

Fourteen (8 Chinese, 6 Japanese) participants' interviews showed that they successfully 'resolved' tensions by reconceptualising the two styles as complementary, rather than contradictory, to create a 'right' balance between the two whilst getting 'the best of both worlds.' These women reframed how mixing certain aspects of each style can enable them to make the most of each approach.

A majority of mothers in this group described their children's education in England as positive because of the quality of life their children could get from a stress-free educational environment. However, concurrently, in the talks of some mothers the allegedly liberal mode of education in England was depicted as having its own weaknesses as well as strengths, which could be improved by incorporating the supposedly regimented methods of education. It was illustrated in the account of Ping. In her narrative giving children opportunities to engage in activities children like, rather than what their mothers want them to do, was recognised as a positive aspect of English life for children. However, English schools were simultaneously described as not putting enough pressure on students, and thus extra work at home was seen as vital:

In China, families think education is most important and here it seems different. I also recognise the good things here; children get lots of time to do other activities, play sports, musical instruments, do arts and all sorts of curriculum outside the school activities and they've got a lot of time to play as well. It's also very important. So it's not just read a book and all do the work, so it's good. Also, having this free space helps children to work more effectively than when they're pushed to work all the time. But, at the same time I find maybe school should push children a bit harder, give them a bit more work, so you never get that perfect. That's why I give him extra work and teach him at home.

In this, keeping the balance between play and study was depicted as important for children. Therefore, while making sure children got free time to enjoy themselves, relying on the English school system was not sufficient as it did not pressurise students enough to work hard. In this respect, this allegedly liberal way needs to be incorporated with the supposedly regimented style in order to create the 'perfect' balance.

Reframing was also used by Mika as a way of dealing with tensions arising from the application of the regimented method to her older son. Mika, who lived in Harrow, knew many Japanese mothers who were highly zealous in their children's education. As a result of their influence, she pressurised her son against his wish, causing a strong resentment from him, which made her rethink and change her approaches:

I used to force him to study, then our relationship was broken because he wouldn't do any work so I forced him to do every day and one day he lost his temper. "I don't like mummy! Your face is scary!" So then I stopped. I wanted him to go to a good school, but I thought it was maybe for myself, it's nothing to do with Tom. He didn't desire and he is not academic...And then I thought maybe I would destroy Tom's personality by forcing him and he would hate me, which isn't what I wanted so I gave up. But he has to do something so I asked a private tutor, but I asked him "Don't give him too much homework. He studies twice a week with you and give him five homework, that's all."...He seems happy now and we found he likes making things like Lego so I'm very happy that he continues making things he is good at, because then he can find a job he likes in the future.

The above account illustrates changes in Mika's approach to her son's education at different times, from the regimented style to the more liberal. However, this shift did not mean complete renunciation of her regimented method, evidenced in the use of a private tutor. Her account seems to suggest that the combination of a more liberal approach with formal support via

private tutoring would best suit her son, generating a positive outcome for his future. Through this reframing Mika was able to come up with an agreeable solution that released the tensions, making both her and her son happy. Her use of a private tutor twice a week is also suggestive of the relatively secure economic situation of her household. Even if information on her household income was not given and she was not employed, her husband worked in IT in the City with a high salary. In that sense, reframing with the combination of both educational styles might have been possible, rather than taking, for instance, a neutral approach through which the two styles were seen as contradictory and thus compromised. These excerpts additionally illustrate the multiple possibilities available in a diasporic space, which migrant women utilise to gain better outcomes for their children and themselves. This also indicates education of children becomes a locus where ‘good mothering’ is contested and manifested as multiple discourses around child-centred or parent-centred approaches are vying for its validity. Here Mika was faced with the dilemma of preserving his ‘good’ personality by not imposing upon him something he did not want, but simultaneously she felt the responsibility to ensure support for his future by helping him to have proper qualifications and skills, and reframing provided the solution for it by meeting somewhere in the middle through compromise.

However, reframing suggests the continuing aspects of ‘concerted cultivation’ practised by these middle-class mothers through extra homework and private tutoring. Whilst they adopted a more relaxed approach, it is arguable that they did not move beyond middle-class dispositions or the interventionist approach of middle-class parents by carefully managing their children’s education, observed in other studies (Kirby, 2016; Lareau, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2007; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016).

Looking at various individual biographical factors, it is not clear though which of these factors have affected mothers in this group to choose reframing, since mothers in this category had a range of different biographical backgrounds, including divergent lengths of settlement.

However, it is worth noting that this strategy was mainly used by Japanese and Chinese mothers. Many Chinese and Japanese mothers took more combined approaches than Korean mothers. This seems to illustrate the divergent implications of localities for Chinese and Japanese in this study, who resided in areas where more diverse ethnic groups co-exist, compared to the Korean women. It is difficult to generalise the link between their economic circumstances and the educational behaviour of mothers in this group due to a wide range of household incomes. However, as discussed in the case of Mika, there might be some degree of connection between the two among some women in this group, enabling them to negotiate perceived tensions with more confidence supported by their financial capacity. This might have generated more satisfactory outcomes for themselves and their children than the one who used neutralisation.

Discussions and conclusions

Applying the works of Baxter (1990) and Baxter & Montgomery (1996), this paper illuminates the complexity and multiplicity of migrant mothers' experiences in their children's education through which their gendered, classed and racialised positions are contested. My analysis suggests that a range of components, such as class, locality and husbands' ethnicity, have influenced East Asian mothers' perceptions and behaviours towards their children's education in England. This demonstrates the diversity and malleability of educational culture within this group in intersecting with other social and economic factors. Consistent with this, a plethora of research has challenged the monochromic cultural framework for East Asian migrants' educational drive by examining multiple social and environmental variables, such as the recent immigration policy of host societies, immigrants' aspiration & anxiety, and their class positions (Ho, 2020; Lee & Zhou, 2017; Watkins, Ho & Butler, 2017). In addition, multitudes of educational beliefs and practices co-exist within England, as illuminated by numerous publications (Ball et al., 1995; Kirby, 2016; Pilkington, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2007; Vincent

& Maxwell, 2016). These elucidate the falsity of the dichotomous understanding by East Asian mothers, founded on the simplistic divide between 'East' and 'West'. Nevertheless, in their life as immigrants, such a *perceived* binary existed as opposing forces that needed to be managed strategically, whether they chose one or the other, or a combination of the two to create a harmony.

The accounts of those who used selection by adhering to the educational style *perceived-to-be* typical in their countries of origin revealed their predominant inclination for the regimented method, including common use of 'shadow education', despite their positive depiction of 'the liberal style' education. Within this position, high academic achievement was implicated as the necessary route to success in life for their children. This is particularly pertinent for the cases of immigrants, as illustrated by Mijung's account, because education was considered as a crucial vehicle for some migrant mothers to ensure the successful assimilation and positioning of their children in Britain, based on their merit, not hindered by the language barrier like their parents' generation (Zhou & Kim, 2006). In this, mothers' role as a key figure in arranging and overseeing their children's education has important meaning in their life as disadvantaged first-generation migrants (Durand, 2011). However, simultaneously education operates as the locus where the intensification of the gendering process of migrant women takes place through the interaction between their motherhood, class, and minority ethnic positions.

The accounts of those who took 'the liberal way' seem to illuminate the educational beliefs and behaviours were not only about education but also reflected the general attitudes of mothers towards their children. In this sense, their talk resembled the child centred discourse of Western mothers, which values individual freedom and happiness (Hays, 1996). Their accounts to some extent resonated with the 'natural growth' framework taken by working-class parents in Lareau's (2003) study. However, there was no concrete evidence to suggest that

these mothers' practices were in line with those of Lareau's working-class counterparts, especially a sense of constraint in their interactions in institutional settings.

Whilst half of the participants used selection by choosing one way over another, only one Korean participant chose neutralisation through the moderate use of both systems. Although this mother talked about the comparative advantages of educating her children in England, she did not seem to be fully satisfied with 'the liberal style' education. In fact, she appeared to be more inclined to the regimented mode in some ways, with her stress on the importance of education and her desire for 'shadow education', albeit not as strongly as those who selected 'the regimented style' of education, possibly due to her financial situation to some extent.

Compared to the one who chose neutralisation, those who used reframing appeared to be more satisfied with their 'choice'. The women in this group were conscious of the strengths and weaknesses of both educational systems and therefore tried to get 'the best of both worlds' by redefining the relationship between the two systems and combining certain aspects from both cultural norms and practices. Through this process they were able to reposition themselves whilst making sense of their decisions. As Baxter and Montgomery (1996) suggested, this clearly illustrates dynamic interaction between opposing components, which clash yet simultaneously influence each other, causing changes. Whilst the difference in the accounts between those who used selection by choosing 'the regimented style' and those who used reframing was evident, similar traits were found in both groups. For example, within these groups hierarchical human relationships were apparent as children were often expected to work hard and follow their mothers' decisions. Although the accounts of those who used reframing revealed more child-centred attitudes than the talk of those who supported the regimented style of education, the mothers' decisions over the lives of their children were still represented as central.

With specific reference to the findings of Vincent et al. (2012), East Asian mothers in my study did not talk about how education becomes a salient means to combat racism, dissimilar to black middle-class parents in England. However, it was evident that education was regarded as a vital means to achieve social mobilisation for their second-generation immigrant children by some, as discussed previously. In this sense, there is arguably some parallel between my findings and those of Vincent et al. (2012) in terms of interlocking relations between education and 'race', in which education is considered by some ethnic minorities to be a vital mechanism to tackle racial disadvantages. Therefore, it can be suggested that high importance on education among many East Asians is associated with their cultural backgrounds as well as their aspirations as migrants for their children's success in life (Ho, 2020).

As demonstrated by divergent dialectic strategies taken by East Asian migrant women towards their children's education in England, a diasporic space provided multiple possibilities for these women to utilise in dealing with supposedly contradictory beliefs and practices around education.

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ⁱ Ethics

Ethical issues were carefully considered and submitted to the author’s university Research Ethics Committee for its review and approval (ID: 3731). In order to protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in this paper.ⁱ