

Motherhood of New Middle-Class Women in Elementary and Junior High School Children's Afterschool Education

—Women in Nanjing and Shanghai as Survey Object—

Abstract

In the texture of education being valued and mothers becoming the main care giver, this research eagers to find out what mothers are doing to help with children's afterschool study, what kind of anxiety or problems they are suffering during the study as well as being a mother, do they ever thought about an ideal motherhood, by using a series of conceptions like: new middle class, motherhood, role labor, invisible educator

This research uses participant observation and deep-interview as methods to survey and selects 6 mothers whose child is in elementary school or junior high in Nanjing and Shanghai as survey object. In conclusion, first of all, survey objects all take "become a mother" as nature, however, they still need to obtain motherhood by role laboring consciously or unconsciously. Secondly, when the scale of school education is being narrowed, needs of afterschool education is filled with market economy, which let mothers become an invisible shadow educator and suffer some motherhood anxiety.

Keywords

Intensive motherhood, extensive motherhood, new middle-class, afterschool education

Beginning

Based on research done by Aries, we have already known that the view of children we have now is totally different from the Middle Ages. In <Centuries of Childhood > (Aries 1980), Aries finds that the image of beloved children is not made until modern age and children used to be treated as "small adult". When it comes to modern time, children become "economic useless but emotional priceless." (藍,2019)

View of children is not only shifted in Europe but also in Japan and China. In Japan, children used to be thought as toys belong to their parents, however, in 1890s a brand new image of children was created because of the social revolution and the willing to learn from the European countries. That means, children's image shifted from "an incomplete thing" to "an angle of family" (沢山,2013). As a result, children, the symbol of love, are considered to be an object that need lots of love and care. Especially in 1910s-1920s, fertile conception has changed into "give less birth and give better care". Lower amounts of children in one family, let parents to value their kids more, not only in daily care but also in education.

Also, in China, view of children has changed four times. At the first step, children were thought to be immature adult as well in Song Dynasty and then turned to be national human resources in Qing Dynasty. Along with the social revolution, children were thought to be "special" and need to be protected in 1920s. Although in the war period, children were back to "national belongs"(杨,2020), finally, when "one-child policy" started after 1982, children are thought be very precious and also the central of a family.

New view of children established since modern time is ensuring children's core position of family. They are considered to be the future of family, central of education, object of family strategy.

When talking about education, school has a huge responsibility. However, nowadays, the education that parents are responsible for, which is also called afterschool education or family education is being emphasized. In Japan, 1988's bubble economy made parents have the ability and fortune to invest in children's education. And at the same time, education was being marketed and with the interaction, cram school expanded vastly. When it came to 2000, social educational problems like school bully pushed government to value and appeal the importance of family education. What's more, government made policy to lighten the school educational burden which is called "yutori kyoiku" in Japanese. But since the policy cannot change the population or the way to access up social movement, afterschool education became even more important and extensive than before.

The familiar situation happened in China as well. With the huge population and compressed modernity(落合,2013), it is hard to compete with the others just depend the school education. Meanwhile, the passion towards education makes “exam-oriented education” a social problem in China, thus, from 2013 until today, government has announced many policies like “减负十条” to narrow the school education burden. However, just like Japan, parents turn to choose afterschool education services and put the point in family education. In other words, the narrow of public education has enlarged the private education.

This research treats education that not involved in public education as afterschool education. It includes home teaching, using of the marketed educational services like cram school, hobby school, summer camps, home tutoring and so on.

Prior research

1. Motherhood and mothering

First of all, it is critical to define what is motherhood. This word has long been used in European researches. The simplest definition is events around care giving and teaching, also the responsibilities have to take as being a mother (Arendell, Terry, 2000) . Then talking about mothering, it mainly has two kinds. The first one was mentioned by Hays (1996) which is called intensive mothering. It means mothers should be the central caregivers of children and that ideal child rearing is time intensive, guided by experts, and emotionally engrossing. Intensive mothering depends not only adequate time but also emotion, demanding women to be a mother rather than herself. Then, because of the develop of labor market and the need of social improvement, women were encouraged to work as men, so the second kind of mothering came into view, extensive mothering. Karen (2012) defines the extensive mothering as mothers delegate substantial amounts of the day-to-day child care to others, and reframe good mothering as being “in charge” of and ultimately responsible for their children’s wellbeing. Women can no longer just be

ideal mothers but ideal workers as well.

In Japan, 1910s-1920s is a key period when Capitalism started to change the society and the construction of family. Women in that time were told to obey the gender rules as being a housewife and the care giver/ teacher of their children. Especially the “three-year-old myth” publicized by experts, women were aimed to be a good mother and good teacher, they volunteered to stay at home and bring children up. Although, the mainstream mothering ideology used to be intensive, it hasn’t changed a lot even nowadays in Japan. The M curve shows that even women used to work, they turn to resign and pregnant. They would like to come back to work in part-time not full- time. This suggests that the mothering ideology in Japan is most of time, being extensive.

On the other hand, in country has high woman laboring rate (Reverse U curve) and restriction on birthing like China, it is quite common to ask grandparents to be helper and it is so called “421construction” (劉,2006) . It ensures women to choose extensive mothering, however, sometimes they have to choose extensive mothering because the social ideology that treat housewife as low working ability (鄭,2010) or the parasite of society (吴小英, 2014) . Thus, we can conclude that most mothering in China can be extensive mothering.

According to 陶艳兰’s (2013) deep interview survey, she concluded the kind of mothering ideology in 0-6 years old children’s care giving. The first one is mother being the responsible person of everything about child. Second, to give orders to kins and depend on them to take care about child. Last one is mother as the leader of family members, making a kinship group that give care to child and distribute tasks about care to relatives.

In prior research, there are various of survey about mothering or motherhood, however, nearly all of them are related to care giving of 0-6 years old children, which means they are all researches about children before school. Thus, it is meaningful to focus on mothers whose child is in his/her school age.

2. Women and afterschool education

As we have mentioned in the beginning part, the view of children had gone through a transformation. Meanwhile, the construction of family also changed. The key changing point of Japanese family was 1910s-1920s, the same time of children's view change. Before the so called modern family was set, fathers who had the right to be educated, were responsible to children's education. However, in the new form of family, women who gave birth to children, were thought to be omnipotent to their kids, thus they had the authority to be with their children and teach their children. This role is given by the biological different, which is also called "sex", build the "motherhood myth". And because of the motherhood myth, women were considered automatically to be the instructor and teacher of children(沢崎壮宏,2005) . What's more, the myth forced women to act as a mother prior than any roles, understanding all needs of children and sacrifice themselves than anyone else to meet all the wills of children (小玉亮子,2016) .

In addition, another symbol of modern family is gender role which means man work outside and women stay at home being housewife. So, teaching children is thought to be part of the housework and thus leading women to charge with it. Due to those expectation of women being responsible for children, a mother, a wife, gender role was reconstructed by the society. For example, in 1870s to the beginning of 20th century, "wife who is lack of knowledge would bored their husband, so let them be taught" was popular in German (小玉亮子,2016) . This kind of thought let women to be educated and created the "professional mother" who was aimed at giving care, educating children and doing housework. Also, being impacted by European thoughts, in Meiji period, Japanese female education based on the "good wife and mother" ideology get normalized. Women were eager to educate their children by their own and war thought to be a birth and educate right given to mother (神原文子,2001) . Woman who took educating children as a career and be highly educated was call "teaching mother" (金一虹,2015) .

Also, many prior researches have proved the influence mother can give to children's education. 卯月 (2004) said mothers' daily behavior and expectations towards children mean a lot. 李和静 (2016) and 薛海平 (2018) declared that mothers' educational level and social capital would determine the quality of afterschool education.

3. Educational anxiety and motherhood anxiety of new middle class

Although it is hard to make standards to separate social classes, there still has definition for us to understand what is new middle class. According Mills, who firstly concentrated on new middle class, analyzed that because little people would own huge wealth, old middle class tend to reduce and due to the social division of labor in industrial society, new middle class came into reality. Not like the old middle class, new middle class do not own land or business, they have to sell their career skills to earn living (Mills 2002) . In addition, 沢山 (2013) defines new middle class as people who do not have means of production, their life style is to use study ability like certifications to guarantee their life. Also, 藍 (2019) says new middle class are people who use the institutionalized cultural capital as a tool to find a nice job and earn stable income to fulfill upwards social movement.

As a conclusion, in this research, I'd like to define the objects who have their own house, doing a full-time job, being highly educated and planning to let their children to be highly educated too as new middle class.

However, since new middle class do not own economic capital and means of production, they can be easily replaced. And they are easily impacted by economy environment, as long as they lose their job, it is so possible for them to fall down from middle. Especially in this global society, competing is getting intense. One has to get nice grade but also communication ability, social ability, human resources to keep in middle

class, so the worry towards “fall down” is normal (本田,2008).

In this texture, women, who are ultimately responsible for children, can easily feel anxiety and pressure about children’s education. As the importance of education being highlighted and education being marketed, the number of mothers who think themselves are not doing the best is increasing (趙,2011) . Mothers who are aimed to be almighty and treat themselves as children’s manager (杨可,2018) , using their social capital and money to ensure children’s afterschool education, are still not satisfied with themselves, cause they seem never to be perfect.

Abstraction of survey objects

name	age	Education	career	Husband’s job	Children’s age/sex
T	43(1978)	Junior college	housewife	Manager	12(6 grade F)
F	41(1980)	Technical school	Accountant - Housewife	Manager	13(7 grade F)
J	39(1982)	Bachelor	Soldier-Tax department secretary	Military auditor	11(5 grade M)
X	39(1982)	Master	Independent teacher	Independent teacher	10(4 grade F)
D	36(1984)	Bachelor	Manager - independent international study guidance teacher	salesman	10(4 grade M)
Z	38(1983)	Bachelor	Trade-housewife	salesman	10(4 grade M)

1.Role laboring: to obtain the “naturally given motherhood” proactively

In this modern society which the view of children has already transformed and the importance of education being emphasized, becoming a mother is always thought sacred and responsible. Therefore, it is reasonable for women to plan their motherhood in educating children before they get pregnant. However, in this research, despite different career and childhood background, all the survey objects show no prediction about motherhood and describe the process as:

--J: Birthing is a very natural thing

--X: You'll know how to educate after you give birth. I know someone is always waiting for a right time, but in my opinion these people are just wasting their life since there is no perfect time for you to enter the next step of life. We live by following our age.

--Z: I haven't. It is so natural...and fertility view will be affected by the previous generation.

--F: I always think having my own child is a necessary part of my life, so since I got pregnant, I gave birth. Actually, I often think about how to being a mom in hindsight.

--T: Life a natural process, you'll lose something if don't have a child.

From these answers we are able to recognize motherhood as “naturally given”, however, on the other side, they also make an addition to explain their nervous and anxiety in educating their child, which let the word “naturally” not so “born with them”.

--D: When my daughter entered elementary school, I almost know nothing about educating, so I let herself to make a decision in many things.

--F: It's my first time to behave like a mom, when it comes to education, I get confused a lot. So, maybe child will just grow up independently.

--J: I was quite anxious since many stuff was so blur when she became an elementary school student, and no one was there to help me, all I could rely on in only myself.

“Naturally given motherhood” is actually made by specific mechanism. This mechanism can be explained by the word “accompany” which is mentioned by every mother when they talk about the **ideal motherhood** of children’s afterschool education.

--F: You need to do the homework with her, sit beside her and correct the mistake as long as you notice.

--J: Accompany his study uninterruptedly, always there for him and check his homework even you are tired after work.

--T: Child will be so relieved when you are in her view. So you need to stay in her vision as soon as she arrives home from school. Even you are doing your own stuff, it is critical to stay in the same space, make sure she can see you every time.

--D: You have to let your child stay with you. Always let yourself at home when your child come back since he will be so cheered up. My son always asks me if I am home today, and he looks so happy when I tell him yes.

According to conception of emotional labor mentioned by Hochschild, behaving like a mother is absolutely a practice for women to control their feelings and take the household burden. But this conception seems to be more suitable for women who have already got used to being mother, we need a further explanation for the process as their identity shifts “naturally” from a woman to a mother.

In this research, I would like to bring out a new concept “role labor” to explain it. The definition of role labor is in order to obtain the ideal motherhood (which also means their

sense of identity towards being a mother) mentioned by mother themselves, they take the participation in afterschool education as a method and a way to achieve this aim. Different from “gender labor” mentioned by Jane Ward (2010) which put the point on serving others (usually more powerful side) and giving the other one gender (for example, to make a man feel like a “man”), role labor would like to put the emphasis on role the actors give themselves. In the other words, the central of role labor is not the others but the women themselves. Because mothers in this survey are eager to give themselves the recognition of “ideal mother”, so they are willing to do a series of emotional and physical labor. Also, instead of responding to the demand of their child, they behave around their own demand.

Ever since 1990s, “gender is a product constructed by society” was popular among the feminism research (丸山,2013), until today we are still used to putting women on the passive side, considering them have to adapt this “woman=mother” gender construction which is made by society and culture.

However, through this research, becoming a mother is still absolute on the level of essentialism. It can be seen from initiative as being a mother. They gain motherhood actively through all kinds of interaction with their child and act what an ideal mother would do such as accompany the homework, choose school that fits child’s personality, observe the specialty of child and communicate with child to choose afterschool class or try to make friends with other mothers. This role labor is proactive. And in their opinions, whatever the educational information collecting, class choosing, accompany the study even the anxiety or helplessness are all indispensable and enjoyable parts of role labor. As what X has said, **“I am better at being a mother than before. My girl changes me a lot, let me notice many of my problems”** or T’s **“Studying with her is a process that both of us being mature”**, Z’s **“Child is mirror of mine, sometimes it is not me teaching him but let me to recognize myself through him, let me reflect about myself”**, D’s **“My son will tell me that my words hurt his feeling, so I could realize my problem in choosing words and apologize.”**

Emphasis on interactive growth can be treated as an against towards mainstream

opinion of “successful educator”. They do not simply make a difference between “success” and “lose” but treat the education as a process of trial and error and self-reflection which ease the nervous and anxiety during educating. What’s more, the responsibility of being a mother is also the same as what Gilligan mentioned in ethics of care, a creation of identity.

Also, towards ideal motherhood, although survey objects did not think about it previously, they do have standard. When answering “What kind of mother is not ideal”,

--F: Mother who only minds her own business or who only wants to feel at ease.

--T: Leave their child to do her own stuff.

--J: Mother who doesn’t know the schedule of child’s study, doesn’t participate in child’s homework or make plan for her child.

We can feel they want to stay away from the role that “mother who doesn’t accompany her child” and also the criticism towards the past experience of choosing extended motherhood.

--F: Although job does matter, study phase will come back if you miss it. I feel regret but it is useless.

--T: It’s better to become a housewife. My resignation is correct or I would miss a lot.

--D: Now my son is 4th grade, I think the past mode is definitely wrong so I choose to be my own boss. I work at home now and feel free, it is convenient to study with him.

Mothers are likely to negate that individual development and independent life stage when children in their school age. It shows that ideal motherhood is mother and child being integrated and very intensive parental relationship. This view is familiar with Japanese “three-year-old myth”, only the cognition shifts from “It all depends on mother’s hands before three years old” to the continuously accompany during study phase. Unconsciously, women who just get rid of “successful education mother/ unsuccessful mother” jump into the social norms of “ideal mother/bad mother.”

2. Guiding education: outsiders of education under market economy

In December of 2000, Japanese Government announced that “family is the start line of education”(本田 2008), until 2005 boom of junior high examination contest was made by the creation of integrated junior and senior high school. As a result, lots of cram schools were preferred by parents. In December of 2006, government mentioned that “parents are the most responsible person for children’s education”, thus home educational responsibility became more detailed, leading parent (basically mother) had to take more burden of afterschool education. The same situation also happened in China. When exam-oriented education has been long criticized, department of education announced “Ten regulations to light educational burden”, which ruled the amount of homework and so on. Also, in the beginning of 2021, department of education aimed at alleviating homework pressure again, ruled that in the phase of elementary school, students need to finish their homework before after school. It sounds like students could have less study pressure, however, since social selection mechanism has changed, the core of valuing education is maintained. Parents are not released, on the contrast, they doubt the “relaxing public education” (横田,2013) and giving effort on afterschool education, concentrating on educational business in market economy.

本田 (2008) and 藍 (2019) have concluded the features of new middle-class parents in education through qualitative research, “guiding” which means to let children find answers by themselves. This feature can also be seen in this research.

--T: You can tell the method but not the answer.

--F: Let herself to think independently and know how to study.

--D: Study is his own business, if he has difficulties, he will ask me for help, thus I will teach him rules of problems and let himself solve the questions.

--Z: It is a process to motivate his independence. What I would only ask is whether

he has finished today's tasks and are there some problems or not. If there is, I would help, but most of time I would not bother.

--J: You definitely can't just tell him the answer, since it is meaningless.

However, on the other hand, mothers who were born in the 1980s have learned totally different knowledge in their childhood, also the points of each subject also changed a lot. So, they narrate like this in the same time.

--T: I can't tell many contents of her study... What I can do is check whether she has finished her homework. Some simple math questions would be fine, but subjects like English and Chinese is above my ability, so I depend on the cram school.

--Z: I only check if the homework is done not the correction. I can't help a lot.

--F: Her homework is already too difficult for me to handle. It is all rely on her self-discipline and cram school teachers.

--J: I am a little different cause I know how to answer the questions, but it is quite complicate to explain why. Maybe the mechanism of understanding knowledge is different from children to adults, so professional teachers are way better.

--X: Give study back to teachers. Professional people do professional stuff.

Obviously, even for those highly educated mothers, changes in educational field, forget of fundamental knowledge and challenge in how to make children understand are all obstacles for them to be totally independent for the educational market and practice on their own. Even like D, who has the certification of high-leveled English and works in abroad study field, is sending her son to English conversation cram school. She said, **"I have tried a lot but failed. He couldn't follow my step and the feeling of failure was so strong that I give up. I just can't figure out why I can't manage it. So, it is wise not to waste time and send him study in cram school."** The familiar opinion can be heard from F and T, **"Mathematical formula is too hard to explain", "I've already forgotten a lot. Thus, I have to teach myself before teach her. And when I open the book, I find the way to explain is totally different from our times."**

This kind of contradiction and contrast shows that, under the expanding rage of

afterschool education and education being marketed, mothers who are thought to be in charge of education is in fact, becoming invisible and the shadow of afterschool education. To analyze the reason, knowing the study contents and study situation needs not only outstanding educational ability but also intensive care. This kind of role can be concluded as “**Managerlized motherhood**”(杨可,2018). However, for most new middle-class mothers, who are theoretically perfect but practically defective, it is hard to educate all by themselves. And because of responsibility, when they are not able to do it flawlessly, they turn to use the market resources like education institution, cram school or home teacher, which I’d like to call this kind of behavior as “educational subcontract”. Neoliberalism is chosen by mothers, and at the same time replace their motherhood practice in afterschool education. It fulfilled mothers’ need but also expelled them from afterschool education, letting them act as organizer but also outsider.

This contradictory result brings women motherhood anxiety, acting as the loose of authority in education. They are challenged and doubted by children.

--T: Every time when I tell her to study, she will argue that I am not study too. And she has to ask her father difficult questions sinch I cannot teach her.

--F: Studying abroad makes things more difficult. My English is way behind my daughter, so she won’t ask me questions at the first time. I am no longer authoritative in study, what I can do is to wish she can manage herself.

When parental authority is no longer solid, the most intuitive feeling is mothers’ educational speaking right has been challenged. Like what D has said in the end of this interview, “**The happiest time is before he entered elementary school. He was so nice and so happy to be with you. But these years as he has become an elementary school student, he doubted me a lot. Even, sometimes he just wants to stay alone or tell me he is not willing to do homework.**” As a result, their opinions cannot be reflected from results and what’s more, brings potential parent-child conflicts. Before they educate their own child, they need to think about how to teach, how to explain and how to handle the situation that child won’t listen to them, what’s more, how to ensure the efficiency and

child's mental health since their words may be hurtful. Thus, we can predict that, mother whose educational speaking right is being challenged will suffer more motherhood anxiety.

Of course, there are people using the other way to teach. For example, in order to manage the study material, J photographs every slide of ppts and keeps herself to be highly involved in both school education and afterschool education. So far, she has not experienced the feeling of losing authority as being a mother, however, it is maintained by sacrifice of lots of leisure time and sleep. **“I cannot do my own stuff unless stay up late”**, said by J. The other one is X, who owns a private cram school. She told me that **“teaching my daughter is an extend of work not the rage of family life. I treat her like a normal student when she is in my class. I find her weakness, observe what she is good at. I come back to the role of mother only when the class is over.”** Her answer shows she is actually doing unpaid labor almost every day. Certainly, keeping educational speaking of right can make mother suffer less conflict in afterschool education, however, it is depended on mother's sacrifice of relaxation and may bring them pressure both physically and mentally.

Conclusion

This research wants to find out the ideal motherhood and problems new middle-class mothers are having in afterschool education. And through the interview we find that being a mother is an individual choice and women are willing to give effort to meet the good mother standard. The key word of ideal motherhood is “accompany”, they believe that as long as mothers be with their children, they can grown up nicely. What's more, instead of feeling being forced, they choose to accompany children actively, believe the interaction between mothers and children can make both of them to achieve progress.

However, limited by the teaching ability, mothers have to choose the educational service in the market and as a result, they are becoming invisible educator. This result may bring them educational anxiety and sense of failure.

Of course, there are many other problems also, like the kinship conflict, the confusion in choosing education methods and change or inherit of motherhood. They will be carried on in the further research.

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