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The role of family musical involvement (FMI) in family relationships

Abstract

Previous studies suggest that family musical activities have a positive influence on family cohesion and well-being. Despite the significance of both family and music in people's lives, few studies have focused on the function of music within the family unit, and very few have examined families in China. This study presents a qualitative investigation into the effects of family musical involvement (FMI) on Chinese family relationships. Participants were recruited from Chengdu, Sichuan, China. Six urban families with 16 people in total participated in the in-depth interviews. The participating families had all experienced the one-child policy and participant accounts include retrospective accounts. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings suggest that FMI can exert both positive and negative impacts on family relationships. FMI can benefit parental relationships and parent-child relationship through nurturing a joint hobby and sharing the responsibility of child rearing. It can also bring about challenges to families, such as encountering issues of integration and control. The impact of negative experiences was short-term, as it was often mediated by the participants in a positive way. FMI benefits families, but the challenges of organising and maintaining it should not be taken for granted.

Introduction

A family's musical life is the first musical environment that a person encounters (Gingras, 2012). Scholars have long acknowledged that music has benefits for family cohesion, social bonding (Boer & Fischer, 2012; Dissanayake, 2000), and human well-being (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008; Morinville et al., 2013). Musical activities and shared music preference help people- particularly young people- to develop individual and collective identities (Boer et al., 2013; North et al., 2010; Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant et al., 2002), and to recognise their position in society (DeNora, 1999; Lidskog, 2016; North & Hargreaves, 1999; Watt & Ash, 1998). Therefore, music

brings people together through shared music preferences (Boer et al., 2011; Selfhout, 2009), shared family identities, shared musical identities (Hancock, 2012), and collective identities (Boer & Abubakar, 2014).

Previous studies have identified the significance of family factors (for instance, parental musical preference and musicality) in the construction and development of one's musical identities (ter Bogt et al., 2011). Participating in musical activities with family members can generate strong emotional bonds (Parncutt, 2009; Trehub, 2009), and music has therefore been found to be a widely used leisure activity (a self-selected activity that often takes place in the participants' free time; Hallam et al., 2017; Karlsen, 2017) and family ritual (various musical behaviours such as listening that are reported within a domestic setting and hold symbolic meaning for the participants; Boer & Abubakar, 2014). In the study of the role of musical engagement on couple relationship, Morgan (2015) suggests that the differences in music preferences could positively support a couple's intimate relationship through the desire to appreciate one another's individual likes and dislikes. Research focusing on family rituals reveals that family relations and positive emotional experience are strengthened when listening to music and talking about one's favourite songs with family members (Boer & Abubakar, 2014).

However, despite the significance of both family and music in people's life, few studies have focused on the role of music within the family unit (Boer & Abubakar, 2014; Morgan, 2015). Scholarly attention to the function of music on family communication and relationships is relatively scarce. Most studies in this research area are based on Western contexts, and few pay attention to the very different context of Chinese society (Higgins, 2001).

Moreover, although many studies have suggested that music offers benefits to human relationships, previous studies have also indicated that music could be problematic in some relationships (Morgan, 2015). Leisure studies have shown that negative experiences, such as conflicts, are likely to exist in family leisure activities (Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2010; Hebblethwaite, 2015). If music is widely used as a leisure activity in families, its influence on family relationship would be worth exploring further.

The purpose of the current study is to understand the influence of family musical involvement (FMI) on Chinese family relationships. The term FMI in this paper is defined as the experience of time spent together by family members (parents and children in particular) engaged in various musical activities, for instance, family members singing, playing and listening to music together, and family members' involvement in music learning and instrument practising. The data presented in this paper are part of another larger and more complex study on the Chinese family musical involvement and musical identities (Gao, 2020).

Background

Several socio-cultural factors are important in shaping Chinese family norms and interpersonal relationships, and in studying FMI in China. Traditional Chinese culture emphasises collectivism, filial piety, interdependence, and social harmony. Collectivism requires individuals to take responsibility for collective good and particularly emphasises familial responsibilities (Guo, 2015). Filial piety is one of the most important concepts in Confucianism, which refers to children's obligations of love, respect, and obedience to parents (Chow, 2000). This principle not only specifies norms within the family, it also provides the moral foundation for maintaining social order and stability (Bedford & Yeh, 2019). The cultural focus on interdependence manifests in Chinese parents' frequent involvement and even intrusion into various domains of their children's lives (Wuyts et al., 2015). The notion of social harmony particularly demands harmony between family members to ensure prosperity (called '*JiaHeWanShiXing*'; Ma & Liu, 2014). Because of the pursuit of harmony, Chinese people are likely to hide their true feelings and act in a socially appropriate manner according to the context and situations (Kacen & Lee, 2002). They may pay greater attention to the maintenance of interpersonal relationships rather than their personal needs and rights (Guo, 2015; Voronov & Singer, 2002).

The one-child policy also has tremendous impact on Chinese family structure, family relationship and family lifestyle (Feng et al., 2014). In 1979, China introduced the one-child policy (ended in 2015) to curb population growth. The policy limited

most families to one child and led parents to ‘centre around’ their only child (Lin, 2018). Many urban Chinese-only-children were called the ‘family hope’ and ‘little emperors’ (Cameron et al., 2013; Fong, 2004). Since China is an achievement-oriented society due to an emphasis on competition, achievement, and success (Hofstede, 2001; Wuyts et al., 2015), Chinese parents feel the most fulfilled when their children are successful in academic performance and careers (Hwang, 2006; Wuyts et al., 2015). Many parents are willing to invest their full attention and money in their only child’s personal development (particularly academic achievement) because they only have one chance to rear a ‘successful’ and well-performing child (Fong, 2007; Wuyts et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the educational system in China is highly examination-oriented (Chen-Hafteck & Xu, 2008; Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Students have to take various tests to gain entrance to a good secondary school and a prestigious college. Nevertheless, some schools and universities have a lower entrance requirement for students who display excellence in arts and sports. Hence, many parents actively encourage and even force their children to learn a musical instrument in order to attend a better school or college. During the last three decades, a ‘fever’ of taking after-school music education has gradually spread across the country.

In sum, a range of socio-cultural factors can enable Chinese parents and children to negotiate multiple identities in family interactions. Since Chinese parents may have experienced more social pressure regarding their children’s achievement, they can be more psychologically controlling to their children than Western parents (Wuyts et al., 2015). However, the one-child policy may impel many Chinese parents to be more devoted to their children (Guo, 2015). The cultural beliefs about social harmony can promote both parents and children to adopt harmony-seeking behaviours to maintain a decent relationship, for example, avoiding confrontation by making compromise or sacrificing their own interests (Cheung et al., 2020). The fever of music training may also affect many families’ lifestyle and attitudes toward music participation, as parents have to devote extra attention and money to music.

Research Methods

Sample

Due to time constraints, convenience sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) was used in the process of participant recruitment. The participants recruited in the research were connected to the first author's social network. To ensure the richness of the data, the research design incorporated two criteria. Firstly, the sampling unit should be an intact family that do not experience divorce or parental separation, as each individual family member's accounts should be included in the data collection. Secondly, participating families should be musical: they (at least one family member) should be actively involved in musical activities (for example, singing, music listening, or having a keen interest in music). This consideration was made according to the assumption that the families of people with richer experience of music/art participation are more likely to engage in music (Upright, 2004).

The participants were recruited from the Chengdu, Sichuan, China. 6 middle-class urban families participated in the interview investigation (Figure 1). Each family constituted a household of 3 family members (father, mother, and child). There were 2 adult children, 2 high school age children, and 2 primary school age children. Given that participants were required to have the ability to communicate and express their opinions articulately (Malterud, 2016), the two primary school age children were finally excluded from the interview investigation, and their mothers were asked about their musical activities and other related questions. Thus, 16 people eventually participated in the interviews.

Figure 1. Demographic information of family members. All the names used are pseudonyms.

Participant information		Birth Year	Occupation
Family 1 (F1)	Mr Zhou (father)	1962	Retired civil servant
	Mrs Zhou (mother)	1967	Accountant
	Lily (daughter)	1990 (Age at the time of interview: 27)	College teacher
Family 2 (F2)	Mr Hu (father)	1985	Enterprise staff (works for a local company)
	Mrs Hu (mother)	1985	College counsellor
	Leo (son)	2010 (Age at the time of interview: 6 /not included in the interview)	Primary school student
Family 3 (F3)	Mr Han (father)	1970	Businessman
	Mrs Han (mother)	1970	Civil servant
	Lucy (daughter)	2000 (Age at the time of interview: 16)	High school student
Family 4 (F4)	Mr Wang (father)	1982	Architect
	Mrs Wang (mother)	1983	Nurse
	Penny (daughter)	2010 (Age at the time of interview: 6 /not included in the interview)	Primary school student
Family 5 (F5)	Mr Yang (father)	1963	Civil servant
	Mrs Yang (mother)	1963	Enterprise staff
	Jim (son)	1991 (Age at the time of interview:26)	Violin teacher
Family 6 (F6)	Mr Chen (father)	1972	Enterprise staff
	Mrs Chen (mother)	1972	Enterprise staff
	Jane (daughter)	2001 (Age at the time of interview: 16)	High school student

Data Collection

A qualitative research design using in-language (Mandarin and Sichuan dialect) semi-structured interviews was chosen to collect data. Qualitative approaches could help to explore, understand and interpret participants' personal and social experience, as well as the characteristics of the investigated phenomena (Jonker & Pennink, 2010; Smith, 2008). Therefore, conducting in-depth interviews was considered an appropriate method for this study.

The participants were interviewed separately rather than together, in order to encourage them to speak openly without influence from the presence of others. Participants were asked to talk about what role their family musical experiences played in their family relationships. The key research question addressed in this paper is: 'What is the relationship between FMI and interpersonal interactions and family communication?'

Since audio recording could be helpful in facilitating the transcription process (Silverman, 2001), the interviews were undertaken by the first author and were all audio-recorded with participants' permission. Written informed consent from parents/adults and assent from children/adolescents were obtained. The participants were briefed on the research purpose and process prior to the investigation (Wendler & Grady, 2008). They were also informed that the interviews would be strictly confidential, and all data would be anonymised as pseudonyms would be used to protect their privacy; and that any individual could withdraw from the study at any time.

Reflexivity as a type of self-reflection (Finlay, 2002) was used to enhance the rigor of the research process. Methodologically, reflexivity requires researchers to critically reflect on the entire research process in relation to the context in which the study has been conducted (Gough & Madill, 2012). Researchers could provide their personal agenda and field notes, such as a statement of research motivation and experience pertaining to the research topic (Gough & Madill, 2012). Hence, the first researcher kept fieldnotes to track and address potential biases and assumptions, and any important information about the interview process/participants (for example, participants' emotional climate and facial expression) that may have affected subsequent data analysis.

The research was approved by the College Governance Ethics Office of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (AHSS) at the University of Edinburgh.

Data Analysis

Given that the interviews were conducted in Sichuan dialect, the conversations were transcribed to standard Chinese language following the rules of simple transcription provided by Dresing et al. (2015). The purpose of transcribing the interviews from an oral to a written mode was to organise the conversation in a form amenable to later analysis and translation (Kvale, 2007). The narratives of participants were transcribed literally rather than phonetically, and the dialects were translated into standard Mandarin unless there was no suitable translation for a word or phrase. Filler words, discontinuation, stutters of words, prosodic and phonetic elements were deleted, and sentence structures were retained regardless of possible syntactic errors. Because of the potential loss of connotation, nuances and meaning during translation (Feldermann & Hiebl, 2020), and some Chinese idioms do not have close English equivalents, some words were kept in the source language of Chinese.

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). The transcripts of interviews were originally in Chinese. The first author conducted the transcription and the initial analysis using pseudonyms for the participants, and then translated the coded data and other chosen materials into English. The translated materials were regularly discussed by the research team, and all three authors of this paper took part in developing and refining the themes and sub-themes.

Results

The results presented here illustrate the dynamic role of FMI in family relationships. FMI was perceived as both beneficial and challenging for participating families. Three themes emerged from data analysis: 'Benefits of FMI for Family Relationships', 'Challenges in FMI' and 'Coping with Challenges'. These themes are elaborated in turn below.

Benefits of FMI for Family Relationships

Benefits to parental relationships

Some parents believed that participating in musical activities can be beneficial to their child's personal development. This shared belief promoted these parents to work together to keep the family involved in music, thereby moderating family conflicts and strengthening their marriage:

I think the most important influence is that it helps us experience cooperation between family members, particularly between her father and me...we may have differences in many things, but in terms of music, we have a common belief that we should accompany and help the child to insist on (music learning). (Mother F1)

Father F4 reported that when engaging in FMI, he realised his wife's workload and dedication, and decided to make up for his absence in either domestic affairs or their children's education:

Through these activities you can see your partner's dedication and tolerance. You can see how much energy she has spent on the family, on the child, on how to pull us together. (Father F4)

Benefits to parent-child relationships

FMI was reported to have helped participants gain access to their family members' lives through sharing musical experience, thereby deepening their emotional connections. For example, mother F5 stated that FMI helped her express her care for her child:

You will have an opportunity to experience your child's interests and hobbies, to know what he likes, and he will understand what you like. (Mother F5)

For some parents, FMI could improve their satisfaction level regarding the parent-child relationship when their child could happily engage in music:

Such an interaction [parent-child musical interaction] is very special, it's more impressive and acceptable for young children. If you see your child is happy, you will feel happy too. (Father F2)

Challenges in FMI

The theme, 'Challenges in FMI', illustrates the challenges and issues participants encountered in family musical interactions. These issues were categorised into two sub-themes: 'Negotiating integration' and 'Issues of control'.

Negotiating integration

Negotiating integration reflects participants' attempt and failure to enjoy or to integrate into FMI. Family musical activities were not always intrinsically motivated and fundamentally enjoyable. Those who demonstrated a lack of knowledge, interest, and confidence in music were more likely to report a sense of isolation during family musical interactions. For example, in F1, the daughter Lily was a professional music teacher, and the mother Mrs Zhou was enthusiastic about music. However, the father, Mr Zhou, defined himself as a 'tone deaf' and believed that music was something he could not understand. He engaged in music with his family only because he considered it to be a responsibility:

I think music activities are more fun for them, and my job is mainly to accompany them. So I sometimes feel a bit isolated, feel like I don't know what they are doing. It's like I don't belong to this team. (Mr Zhou, Father F1)

Although family members were interviewed separately, Mr Zhou's issue of integration was observed by his family. Lily reported that she once took her parents to a music concert but was embarrassed by her father falling asleep in the middle of the concert. She commented:

Sometimes taking part in music together can be a burden for us, particularly for my father, I think. (Lily, Daughter F1)

Mrs Zhou also observed her husband's reluctance and incompatibility during FMI:

In all of these occasions he always seems very Gegeburu [incompatible]... I feel speechless. It's like Duiniu tanqin [to cast pearls before swine] ... It feels like he doesn't

understand and he has no interest; sometimes you feel that there is no need to communicate. (Mrs Zhou, Mother F1)

In the comments above, Mrs Zhou used a Chinese idiom ‘*gegeburu*’ to describe Mr Zhou’s dilemma in FMI. The idiom refers to ‘being incompatible’ (Colijn, 2018) and ‘like square pegs in round holes’ (Xue et al., 2015). In earlier conversations, Mrs Zhou described music as ‘*human nature*’. However, when asked to comment on Mr Zhou’s behaviour, she used another Chinese idiom ‘*duiniu tanqin*’ to describe her disappointment. The idiom ‘*duiniu tanqin*’ means to provide something that is valuable to those who do not appreciate it (The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, 2002). It is often compared to the English idiom ‘to cast pearls before swine’ (Zhao & Guo, 2016), and can be literally translated as ‘play the lute to a cow’ (Ma, 2015; Weimer, 2012). Mrs Zhou frankly expressed her frustration at Mr Zhou’s reluctance to cooperate with the family team, as she compared Mr Zhou to a cow with no ability to appreciate music.

In addition to feelings of boredom and lack of motivation during FMI, a sense of inferiority was another manifestation of the integration issue. Father F4 reported that participating in musical activities that he was not interested in made him feel less connected to his family members:

You feel you have a lower sense of ‘Cunzaigan’[a sense of existence] in these activities. You are important in other aspects of the family, but you feel less important in these activities. (Father, F4)

The teenage children described integration issues with the collective nature of FMI. Jane, the daughter of F6, stated that she did not enjoy playing music with her parents:

I think collective activities can easily make people feel embarrassed. I just can’t enjoy parents singing or dancing in front of me, that’s so embarrassing, so silly. (Jane, Daughter F6)

Unlike Lily, who wanted her father to be more engaged in music, Jane felt embarrassed by her parents’ musical engagement and commented their interaction as a ‘*silly*’ behaviour. Perhaps because of the reluctance to blame her parents, Jane attributed the feeling to age-related issues and features of puberty:

I don't know, maybe because of personality? I just don't want to play with them too often, I can't really enjoy collective activities. Especially with my parents, maybe it's a problem of puberty? Especially when they seem to really enjoy (those musical activities) but you can't feel what they feel. (Jane, Daughter F6)

Lily also emphasised that her negative feelings mostly occurred when she was a teenager: 'when adolescence meets menopause, there can be lots of problems, so you may not enjoy being together'. The experiences of Lily and Lucy indicate that organising FMI may be more challenging for families with teenagers.

Issues of control

Participants also reported perceiving a sense of loss of control in FMI. Since FMI is a collective musical activity (as family members can all be involved in), it involves more complex interactions, such as couple communication, parent-child relationships and even competition for power between family members. These issues of control can manifest in different ways: for example, children's loss of autonomy in FMI, mothers' feeling of being unsupported and fathers' sense of powerlessness in family negotiation.

Being pushed to put on a performance for family visitors and take part in various musical activities were the most mentioned unpleasant experience for children. For example, in F1, Mrs Zhou actively encouraged her daughter Lily to take part in different musical activities and training courses. Nevertheless, Lily did not seem to appreciate these opportunities when she was younger, as she used the derogatory term 'show off' to express her dissatisfaction with her mother's behaviour:

For my mother, the fact that I was learning to play the piano was a capital that she could show off to their friends. My mum always wanted me to show off my musical talents. She thought performing in front of the public would make me outstanding. When I was young I hated this the most. (Lily, Daughter F1)

Moreover, Lily assumed that her mother overestimated other people's response. She felt that those visitors lacked respect for her performance. To regain autonomy in

choosing her preferred musical activities, she played the piano for the family visitors in an unexpected way as a rebellion against her mother.

In fact, nobody wanted to listen, who cares whether your daughter can play the piano! I felt like a monkey in a zoo. And then this one time she asked me to play [the piano] again when there were other people in our home, I just played Twinkle Little Star with one hand. It was my silent rebellion against my mother. (Lily, Daughter F1)

In F3, Lucy also encountered the issue of control in FMI. According to Lucy's description, her mother Mrs Han often dictated what was suitable for Lucy to listen to. Moreover, Mrs Han asked Lucy to play the violin for 1-2 hours every day even on holidays, and did not allow Lucy to hang out with friends without finishing her daily practice. However, Lucy regarded this parental involvement in her musical life as an interference that made her feel controlled and under scrutiny. She described how when she was younger, her mother's control of her music life once compelled her to think of ways to end her music career:

I devoted myself to reducing practice time, such as complaining of wrist pain or stomach pain, going to the toilet, running out of the room. I could find hundreds of reasons to stop practising. (Lucy, Daughter F3)

On the other hand, mothers can also perceive their children's fightback against their control. They expressed their frustration and disappointment when they did not receive the expected response from family members. In F3, Mrs Han commented herself as a 'nanny' and 'chauffeur' in the family, as she had to take care of family members and transport Lucy to music class. However, although Mrs Han 'sacrificed' her personal hobbies and time for Lucy's music learning, she felt that her family lacked understanding of her devotion:

These activities are often like a seesaw battle in my home. She became very passive about learning the violin. I asked her to practise; she was always reluctant to take up the violin. Sometimes I felt so anxious and could not help scolding her, so she often cried while practising. The atmosphere was tense whenever it came to playing the violin, and her father also said that I was too pushy. Anyway, I did so many things, but they did not recognise it. (Mrs Han, Mother F3)

In F1, Mrs Zhou was also judged as ‘*extremely controlling*’ by her husband because she was keen to pull all family members together in music. She believed that young children cannot maintain interest in an activity for a long time, and thus as the parent of a music learner, she should help her daughter persevere with practising and learning.

I had to be a strict parent. Anyway, they criticised me a lot of times, saying things like I am extremely controlling, and they can't bear me. (Mrs Zhou, Mother F1)

The above two mothers believed that their dedication to FMI should be acknowledged, but their family members did not respond to them in the way they expected. Due to this lack of support, the spousal communication and parent-child relationships were adversely affected. However, other family members perceived that they were controlled by the mothers’ behaviour.

Some fathers reported encountering control issues in FMI, and their narratives express a sense of powerlessness. The study found that mothers generally played a predominant role in FMI, making decisions for the whole family. Fathers and children might follow the mother’s suggestion to seek a compromise. For example, Mr Zhou shared his experience of having a quarrel with his wife about their child Lily’s music learning. He realised that Lily was not enjoying her music training, so he tried to persuade his wife to abandon Lily’s music learning. However, he found it difficult to position himself as the amiable father of a daughter or a strict parent of a music learner. On one hand, he believed that he should help Lily persevere in her training. On the other hand, he fully understood Lily’s tiredness, so he wanted to help her turn the tables. The couple did not reach an agreement, and to resolve family conflict, he considered that he had to give up the control in FMI.

My family doesn't have the 'musical gene'! I couldn't see the reason for learning about music at that time. However, she didn't listen to me. I have no voice. (Mr Zhou, Father F1)

Mr Zhou diagnosed himself as not having ‘*the musical gene*’, and this self-perceived defect may imperceptibly cause a loss of power and control in FMI, particularly when discussing music in front of a powerful musical wife.

Coping with Challenges

Coping with challenges in FMI is a significant process of how participants benefitted from FMI. Generally, participants made positive comments about FMI directly after reporting the negative aspects of it. They regarded challenges in FMI as an acceptable part of FMI and could find solutions to reduce the negative effects. Such strategies are classified as ‘Looking on the bright side’, ‘Touching moments in FMI’, and ‘Let it go’.

‘Looking on the bright side’

Focusing on the bright side of FMI to build a positive experience is a common self-adjustment strategy. As presented in the previous section, Lily once felt embarrassed when her father fell asleep in a music concert. However, as shown in the following conversations, she eventually came to feel gratitude for her father’s attendance at the music concert. This feeling became particularly salient when she grew older, as her ability to take the perspective of another increased with age.

But now things are getting so much better, and I think this is mainly because as I have grown older, I have started to learn to put myself in others’ shoes. Why should I ask my father to appreciate something that he doesn’t like and understand? That’s too inconsiderate.

My father, a man who doesn’t like music so much, was willing to go to a classical music concert with me! I can recognise his effort and dedication. So, looking on these bright sides, generally music means a lot to us, because everyone contributes a lot.
(Lily, Daughter F1)

When Lily was interviewed, she was already a mother herself. It seemed that the change of identity played an important role in the psychological process of digesting negative emotions. Through ‘putting herself in her father’s shoes’, she recognised her father’s devotion to her and felt empathy with her father. This process of psychological

change helped Lily identify multiple aspects of FMI and acknowledge her parents' contribution.

Touching moments in FMI

Recalling some touching memories of family musical interaction helped some participants accept unpleasant memories in FMI, although they may not have considered at the time that they would be affected by the events at a later date. This could also explain why FMI was highly valued by participants despite the negative experiences they reported. For example, Lily mentioned that when she recognised the importance of perspective-taking, her father's weaker musical ability no longer bothered her. Instead, it helped her build a strong attachment to her father:

A few days ago I found my father singing for my son, and he was a little bit out of tune. But I didn't laugh. Rather, I felt so moved by his off-tune singing. You will suddenly understand: you see, your father is diligently changing himself for you or for your son. (Lily, Daughter F1)

For parents, the touching moments were usually associated with their children's achievement. For example:

My daughter is often chosen to be the lead singer of her school chorus, and when I see her singing I feel proud. (Father F6)

Mothers were emotionally affected when family members recognised their contribution to FMI. For example, the mother of F1 said:

When she [her daughter] went to the college, she said, 'Mum, I am still grateful for you leading me into the field of music. If you didn't push me so hard, I might not have had any achievement in music...' At that moment I felt amply rewarded. (Mother F1)

'Let it go'

‘Let it go’ demonstrates some parents’ self-adjustment strategy through changing the parenting style. The previous section presented the mother-daughter conflict in F3. The mother later reported that in order to ease the tension between her and her daughter, she drew lessons from previous experience and adjusted her parenting:

...governing the child is like holding sand: if you can’t hold it, scatter it... my experience is ‘let it go’, don’t be too strict, especially with things like music, just let it go. (Mrs Han, Mother F3)

The above narratives present participants’ strategies for obtaining positive energy from ostensibly negative FMI. The interpersonal interaction in FMI can be complex, and conflicts and disparities regarding music often occur. Therefore, how participants deal with the unexpected outcomes is particularly important.

Discussion

This paper details new insights into musical engagement within the family unit and highlights the potential effects of FMI on family relationships. Key indicators include:

- FMI could positively influence parental relationships and parent-child relationships through developing a shared responsibility or a shared musical taste.
- FMI can be challenging at the same time: participants may feel it difficult to enjoy family musical activities and attempt to negotiate their integration in FMI; also, they may often have issues of control, such as feelings of resentment between family members.
- The negative experiences may be perceived positively in hindsight as family members may bias their attention toward positive information over time. Hence, the impact of negative experiences could be transient.

FMI was described as ultimately playing a positive role in family relationships despite the negative experiences reported. Those negative experiences may be perceived positively in hindsight as family members may bias their attention toward positive information over time.

Leisure studies suggest that family activities have been found to have contradictory aspects: they are always highly valued as they are believed to have positive benefits, but they can often be experienced as work with negative effects for family members who arrange them (Shaw, 1992, 1997). The motivation for a family activity can simultaneously be intrinsic and obligatory, and thus the activity can generate both positive and negative impacts (Agate, 2010). In accordance with the current research, both positive and negative outcomes coexist in FMI.

Scholars indicate that family activities are often purposive in nature: people facilitate family activities not only to have fun, but to enhance family functioning and foster psychological well-being (Hebblethwaite, 2010; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Family leisure activities with a purposeful and generative intent resolve ambivalent feelings in a positive way, allowing people to address them (Hebblethwaite, 2015). Thus, FMI as a family activity can also be purposive. Fostering a deeper connection and a sense of togetherness may be a goal of FMI, and even though the negative experience is irreconcilable at the time, family members still find strategies to cope with it in the longer term. From this point of view, the positive effects of FMI ultimately outweigh the negative influence.

Emotional theories indicate that in the process of emotional regulation, negative feelings are necessary and adaptive (Charles, 2010). A successful emotional regulation process can somehow irreconcilably trigger negative emotions and the simultaneous occurrence of positive and negative effects (An et al., 2017). In accordance with the current research, participants reported having mixed feelings about FMI and viewed FMI positively directly after reflecting on the negative side of FMI. Their psychological changes are a manifestation of their emotional regulation of transforming negative experiences into positive consequence. This indicates that experiencing unpleasant feelings in FMI may not always be harmful; contrarily, it can eventually become a form of emotional connection- just as participants reported that they were emotionally affected by some memories.

Cross-culturally, researchers have indicated that culture can influence how people view things (An et al., 2017; Eid & Diener, 2001; Miyamoto et al., 2014; Nisbett et al., 2001; Sims et al., 2015). For example, compared with people from individualist cultures

(e.g., Americans), people from collective cultures (e.g., Chinese) tend to report more mixed emotions in a predominantly positive situation (Minkov, 2009). Easterners often take a more balanced view of a negative event relative to Westerners (Ji et al., 2001, 2004). Hence, the Chinese cultural emphasis on social harmony may enable the participants to habitually find a balance between positivity and negativity when reporting their views and emotions.

Previous studies have pointed out that Chinese families' activities focus more on children rather than on other family members (Feng et al., 2014). In this study, participants tended to associate FMI with children's musical training perhaps because parents were highly involved in children's educational activities. Hence, arguably the participating families' FMI was child-centred, and the musical activities of younger children were more education-based, for example, focusing more on musical learning and instrument practising.

Conclusion

Many studies have suggested that musical engagement is beneficial for family and individual wellbeing (Boer & Abubakar, 2014). Contrary to previous research, the findings of this study indicate that musical activities may not always be enjoyable for family members, as differences and conflicts can easily occur during the family's musical interactions. From a positive stance, the negative impact may not last long, as participants regarded the negative experience as a normal part of family life and could soon find solutions to moderate their negative feelings. This also indicates that the effect of FMI somewhat depends on participants' subjective opinions. All participants with negative experiences eventually described FMI as positive. However, since the participants were recruited from the first author's social network, they might tend to report more positive emotions and attitudes about FMI in order to please the researcher, and those who still saw FMI as negative may be less likely to have decided to take part in this study.

The findings concerning negative effects of FMI have practical implications for families. Despite the adage that 'those who play together, stay together', nurturing a

shared hobby through family activities may not be as simple as the notion suggests. The benefits of FMI for family wellbeing should not be taken for granted. Promoting family activities should not simply mean inviting the whole family, and activity providers should take steps to facilitate a more valuable and enjoyable experience for family members involved (Agate, 2010). When organising a musical activity, factors such as individual family members' music preferences, personal interest, personality, and children's age should all be taken into consideration. Simply pulling family members together might not achieve the goal of 'families that play together, stay together'; on the contrary, it may negatively affect individuals' motivation in FMI and their family relationships. Individuals should also recognise that close family relationships are the cornerstone of FMI, and their self-adjustment strategies are crucial factors in how they comment on FMI outcomes.

This study focused on Chinese families' musical involvement, which is an important contribution to the existing literature on musical identities. Future research should endeavour to expand the research scope to include more diverse samples, including families from different cultures and social backgrounds. The research findings imply that some additional factors, such as cultural characteristics and age-related issues, are worth reviewing. However, the interviews did not include the two primary school children. Since a child's opinion is an important aspect in understanding the influence of FMI on participants' family relationships, in the future additional efforts should be made to create opportunities for age-appropriate children to express their views and experiences. All the participating families had experienced the 36-year one-child policy (1979-2015), and therefore it is reasonable to assume that the policy and social circumstance may raise the stakes for Chinese parents and potentially puts more pressure on FMI. Future studies could give attention to cross-cultural comparisons to explore what could each culture gain by adopting from the other- for example, a study comparing Chinese and Western families. A longitudinal study following families over a number of years may also be helpful in better understanding the influence of age on family members' changing attitudes towards FMI.

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