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Early Childhood Education in China

A comparative approach to values and citizenship education in public and private kindergartens in Shanghai

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Early Childhood Education in China:

A comparative approach to values and citizenship
education in public and private kindergartens in
Shanghai

Anca Crowe

Field of Study: Education

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Chinese Studies Research at the Lau China Institute, King's College London

Faculty of Social Science & Public Policy
School of Global Affairs
Lau China Institute
King's College London

Declaration

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Anca Crowe

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Abstract

This dissertation looks at how the interplay between local and global forces has been (re)shaping early childhood education (ECE) in China since the 2010 Education Reform, how and why the dominant discourse has become increasingly keen on promoting values and citizenship education after the 19th National Congress, and whether its strategy has been effective in disseminating the core socialist values in public and private kindergartens. My focus is on analysing the dissemination and internalisation of moral education (labelled ‘values and citizenship education’) and the mainstream North American narratives of Halloween and Christmas in five public and private kindergartens in Shanghai, observed during the academic year 2017-2018. The analysis looks at the relationship between culture, values, and power within a thematic spatiality framework, where I apply a Centre-Periphery lens to position Beijing at the Centre (Space1), public kindergartens on the Space-in-Between (Space2), and private kindergartens on the Periphery (Space3) of the homogenising dominant discourse promoting moral education (*deyu* 德育). Moreover, I use the concepts of sovereign power and Foucauldian disciplinary power to understand the complex power dynamics shaping five elite preschools in Shanghai and the extent to which socialist morality has been successfully inculcated.

I rely on a multitude of data sources, from direct observation of festival celebrations in preschools, interviews with ECE officials, experts, and kindergarten staff and parent questionnaires to key ECE legislation and kindergarten social media accounts and curricula. To assess the power dynamics between local forces promoting the ‘cultivation of socialist builders’ and global ones I tackled the kindergartens’ Spring Festival and China’s National Day narratives, on one hand, and Christmas and Halloween-related ones, on the other, as well as looked at the attitudes and behaviour of a multitude of actors, from local education officials to preschool principals, teachers, parents and children.

My findings indicate that, starting with the 2010 Education Reform but gaining more impetus after the 19th National Congress, Space1, working through local education bureaus and local CCP branches, has increased its efforts of nationalising kindergarten education and pursuing . The Centre thus aims for ECE curricula to contain a moral education core and disseminate a discourse that would ensure the Party’s survival through the nurturing of new generations of loyal citizens who sharing its monolithic vision of ‘Chineseness.’ Based on the narratives promoted on their social media posts, both elite public kindergartens and private bilingual English-Mandarin ones are conforming with this directive. I also showed that Space2 is shaped by both sovereign and disciplinary power and that both staff and parents behave as ‘obedient bodies’ (Foucault 1991), fully aligned with the official rhetoric’s push for moral education. In Space3 the parents and native English teachers are resisting and negotiating with the Centre, retaining the agency to influence educational content by disseminating American narratives of Halloween and Christmas in the classroom, but exercise self-censorship in public, for example by aligning with the patriotic dominant discourse on social media.

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Abbreviations

19 th NCCCCP	19 th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party or <i>shijiuda</i> (十九大)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNY	Chinese New Year
ECE	Early childhood education
ECNU	East China Normal University
IB PYP	International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme
K1	Kindergarten junior class (4-5 year-olds) or <i>zhongban</i> (中班)
K2	Kindergarten senior class (5-6 year-olds) or <i>daban</i> (大班)
MEB	Minhang Education Bureau or <i>minhang jiaoyuju</i> (闵行教育局)
MOE	Ministry of Education
Pre-K	Pre-kindergarten class (3-4 year-olds) or <i>xiaoban</i> (小班)
PTA	Parent-teacher association
PUB1_QUEST1_X/28	Public1 Kindergarten parent questionnaire, November 2017 (28 responses)
PUB1_QUEST2_X/42	Public1 Kindergarten parent questionnaire, March 2018 (42 responses)
PUB3_QUEST1_X/37	Public3 Kindergarten parent questionnaire, November 2017 (37 responses)
PUB3_QUEST2_X/39	Public3 Kindergarten parent questionnaire, March 2018 (39 responses)
PR1_QUEST_X/32	Private1 Kindergarten parent questionnaire, March 2018 (32 responses)
PR2_QUEST_X/10	Private2 Kindergarten parent questionnaire, March 2018 (10 responses)
RMB	Chinese Yuan or <i>renminbi</i> (人民币)
SEB	Shanghai Education Bureau or <i>shanghai jiaoyuju</i> (上海教育局)
SMG	Shanghai Media Group
Space1	Centre – Beijing
Space1.1	Shanghai and local Education Bureaus
Space1.2	Local/ district CCP branches
Space2	Public kindergartens or the <i>Space-in-Between</i>
Space3	Private kindergartens or the <i>Space-on-the-Periphery</i>
STYAP	Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan

Chapter1: Introduction

1.1 Setting the stage

1.1.1 The researcher's positionality within the subject

My fascination with early childhood education (ECE) stems from the vital importance this first stage in human development holds in defining an individual's entire life, as well as from the years I spent as a kindergarten teacher at various preschools in Shanghai. Hence, my passion for this topic is fed not only by an intellectual pursuit - to understand why we become who we are - but is also connected to the emotional attachment I have to my former Chinese pupils, for whom I was the window into what it means to grow up in the geographical and cultural West and who opened my eyes to a different way of life.

By analysing kindergarten curricula and teaching patterns, as well as observing activities and interviewing teaching staff one can gain tremendous insight into “*educational experiences that are characterized by values, goals, intentionality, intrinsically relational [. . .], situated in culture and in time*” (Mantovani 2007: 1115). In line with Mantovani, I use ECE as a lens to compare public and private kindergartens in Shanghai in terms of their patriotic and traditional Chinese values discourses, contrasting them with global discourses promoting Western culture. Moreover, I investigate the power relations between selected Shanghaiese kindergartens - privileged spaces of observation for the State's control or lack thereof - and the Centre – Beijing, in terms of the dissemination of, on the one hand, core socialist and traditional Chinese values, and Western values, on the other.

Fully aware of the pitfalls of constructing the dichotomy “Chinese - Western values,” I decided to build these two categories for the purpose of operational organisation. I do not look at them as unchanging and monolithic, as that would contradict my Foucauldian analytical lens, where culture and identity are fluid, pluralistic, and porous. On the contrary, throughout my analysis I strive to emphasize the plurality of narratives contained by ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Westernness,’ as Foucault looks at identity as not fixed in the traditional sense but mediated by the discourses individuals are exposed to every day (Urbanski 2011). The ‘Chinese’ – ‘Western’ values binary is a compromise in line with how Gramsci defined power relations (Germain and Kenny 1998) and also serves the purpose of simplifying the research question and, when appropriate, delivering more hermetic findings.

In this thesis I aim to paint a unique picture of state-society power dynamics in China within the spatiality of five elite kindergartens in Shanghai by understanding the complex processes of constructing, disseminating, and internalising what I label *citizenship and traditional values education*, a narrowed down dimension of moral education in the mainstream Chinese narrative. Kindergartens are the earliest formally organized spaces of learning, with the dual role of socialising children and preparing them for the learning rigors of primary education. As education plays a vital role in promoting national identity and popular political loyalty (Vickers and Zeng 2017), I use festivals as windows into how kindergartens deal with culture and identity. The celebration of China's National Day, the Spring Festival, Halloween, and Christmas are ideal places for testing the workings of sovereign power in an authoritarian state, as well as Foucault's discourse-mediated identity approach, which he explores particularly in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, the works where he tackles the values and social practices that underpin our moral fabric.

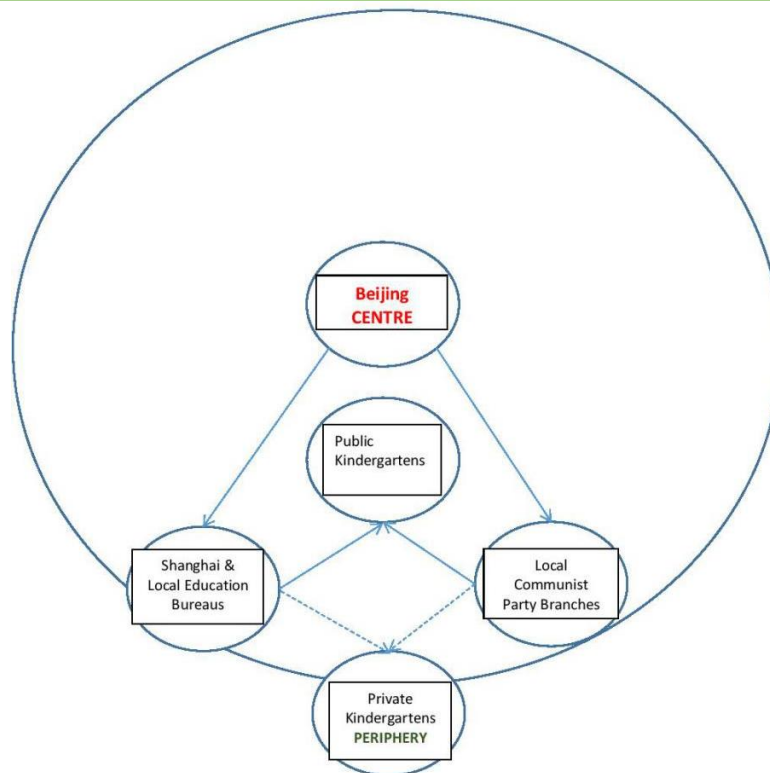
Superficially, a contradiction might arise from the application of Foucault on understanding the nationalisation of ECE in a post-socialist Leninist state like China, as the French philosopher was mostly interested in the subtle ways in which power is exercised

through hegemonic discourse in democratic settings. However, my purpose was to go beyond a simple analysis of looking at Chinese legislation on values and citizenship education, and the way it is embedded in curricula and teaching practices, which Foucault defines as negative or sovereign power. These mechanisms generate a hierarchical relationship, and the construction of patriotic subjects in China is clearly shaped by coercive legislation. On the contrary, to reach a more complex understanding of the situation of ECE in China, the additional use of Foucault's positive power framework allows me to also look at more subtle, but concomitant, avenues of power, namely how disciplinary power and biopower are shaping young patriots in China. While Foucault criticised the analysis of power as solely sovereign in nature and posited the emergence of a new power, a 'power over life' or biopower (Foucault 2008), it does not mean that juridical power ceased to exist: on the contrary, the two types of power coexist and overlap (Nadesan 2008: 6-7). While biopower attempts to control an entire population and those who do not conform are considered 'deviant' (Foucault 2003), disciplinary power focuses on the individual and "*centres on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile*" (Foucault 2003: 249). Thus, discipline is a function of power, disciplining anyone outside of the norm (Philips and Nava 2011), a particularly useful approach for understanding a kindergarten setting. As such, teachers are constructed through the work of disciplinary power, behaving as 'obedient bodies' who conform to norms and assure the proper transfer of knowledge to their pupils (King 1995), thus shaping new generations of 'obedient bodies.'

Using Foucault's power theory applied to education (Foucault 1969; 1980; 1981; 1983; 1990; 1991; 2008; Hass 1996; Deacon 2006; Ball 2013), I posit that kindergartens had evolved on the *Periphery* of the official discourse on ECE until 2010, but that Beijing is growing increasingly interested in exerting more control curricula and teaching patterns. I thus investigate how successful the State has been in nationalising ECE, especially since the 19th National Congress of 2017. With and following the 2010 Education Reform, the Centre has been aiming at homogenising core educational content in kindergartens, be it in public or private ones. Throughout the academic year 2017-2018 my ethnographic work conducted at three top public kindergartens and two private ones has revealed that public kindergartens are very much under the Centre's influence and that they are happy to stay there for the foreseeable future, as both management and parents continue to act as subjects of disciplinary power (Foucault 1980; 1983 and 1991; King 1995), fully aligned with the dominant discourses' push for moral education.

Using a spatial lens (Figure 1.1 [below](#)), I construct public kindergartens as the *Space-in-Between* the Centre and the Periphery, defining resistance in that parents and teaching staff continue to expose the children to Western culture through the celebration of, for example, Halloween and Christmas, and by giving them extracurricular English classes. Because the two elite private kindergartens I observed use bilingual English-Mandarin curricula and employ native English speakers I place them on the Periphery of the homogenising dominant discourse on ECE. While they retain a significant degree of agency and resistance because of their imported curricula and foreign teachers, my observations and interviews indicate that Beijing has started to encroach upon their teaching content, especially since 2017. I define this type of kindergartens as the *Space-on-the-Periphery*, where parents, management, and teachers, especially the native English-speaking staff, can still negotiate with the Centre and have the power to influence educational content, ensuring that largely Western curricula and teaching patterns are being disseminated.

Figure 1.1 Spatial model of the Centre-Periphery relationship between Beijing and public and private kindergartens



Legend:

- Space1: the *Centre* - Beijing - and its reaching arms,
- Space1.1: the Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) and its subsequent local education bureaus
- Space1.2: local CCP branches
- Space2: the *Space-in-Between* - public kindergartens
- Space3: the *Space-on-the-Periphery* - private kindergartens

Figure 1. 1 Spatial model of the Centre-Periphery relationship

1.1.2 A background to Chinese ECE with a focus on the 2010 Education Reform

In recent years there has been an increased scholarly interest in Chinese education, mostly because of China’s impressive economic development since 1978 and its international economic leverage. According to Nye (1990), by understanding a country’s education one gets closer to understanding that country’s economic strength, as an invaluable component of workforce quality is formal education. This argument is reflected in China’s national strategy for innovation, highlighted in the four key documents of the 2010 Education Reform, with the focus on constructing future generations who have internationally marketable skills, as well as a patriotic heart.

Given China’s increasing stake in the global economy, the ongoing development and reform of China’s ECE is of interest not just to educators, but also to international political and business stakeholders. The 2010 National Medium- and Long-Term Reform and Development Plan (the 2010 Development Plan) was a response to the 17th National Congress’s recommendation to “*prioritise the development of education and build a country with strong*

human resources” (Implementation) as an efficient strategy to accelerate the process of socialist modernisation. According to this legislation, until that year Chinese education had been following the development path of socialist education with Chinese characteristics, a much too rigid path which had started to negatively affect its competitive edge on the global market. Under Hu Jintao, Beijing’s response was thus the Education Reform and its 4 macro-level documents (Table 1.1 below), policies which make clear that the dominant discourse understands that the world is multipolar and globalised, shaped by “*fierce talent competition*” (2010 Development Plan, Preamble), and, in order for China to remain competitive, it must reform. The outlined strategy emphasised the need to complement its economic growth with “*improving the quality of the people and cultivating innovative talents*” (Ibid.), deciding that the key to ensuring China’s future as a world leader lies with a modern education with Chinese characteristics.

From a sociological perspective, ECE can be used as a stage for understanding citizenship education (Heater 2004). This education sector used to be relegated to the realm of family responsibility, but in the last decade its pedagogical importance has been gaining considerable attention globally, with China being no exception (Hannum et al. 2007; Kaga et al. 2010). Thus, I use ECE to analyse what the Centre considers to be a ‘good, moral citizen,’ as well as to better grasp the values-based world views of the ordinary Chinese, the latter being represented by the staff and parents of the five observed kindergartens. Since the 2010 Education Reform, the ideological impetus has been to “*cultivate qualified socialist citizens [by] strengthening the education of ideals and beliefs and moral education [...] and the students’ faith and confidence in the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system*” (2010 Development Plan). Moreover, complementary to a socialist education, Beijing’s vision is to “*strengthen education about the Chinese nation’s outstanding cultural traditions and revolutionary traditions*” (Ibid.).

According to the three Shanghai local education officials I interviewed, in the limelight is the private education sector, which the Centre is encouraging since there is a deficit of public kindergartens (EO1; EO2; EO3). Moreover, the State Council is calling for more private preschools and increased social involvement in this sector to drive modernisation and social development (Opinions of the State Council 2010 and 2018; Hu 2017). With the *Two-child policy* in placeⁱ and national predictions for 2021 forecasting the need for about 30% more kindergartens nation-wide (China Daily 2017) the State is not willing to satisfy the demand by building more public kindergartens (Levenson 2017), prioritising other educational stages instead. The solution is building inclusive private kindergartens, which receive subsidies to enrol local children at affordable tuition fees (ME5; ES4). This is the case with Private1 kindergarten, where its local stream caters to neighbourhood children and its fees match those of a public kindergarten of the same rank, being 15 times lower than those for the bilingual programme (PR1K19). Hence, the dominant discourse argues that ECE is a sector that needs to develop quickly, without compromising on quality, and that education entrepreneurs have a vital role to play (ME5; EE6). This positioning is also made clear by the incentive provided in the 2016 Law on Private Education, which stipulates that compulsory education must go non-profit (Chen 2016).ⁱⁱ I contend this new legislation is, on the one hand, a response to global market forces shaping ECE, as the private preschool education sector is on the rise globally because of increased public demand and high profit margins (Education International 2018). On the other hand, this 2016 legislation is also an expression of sovereign power, which means that, in practice, the Centre is increasing its control over educational output: with this law in place, it becomes easier for the State to ensure that pupils are shaped by a nationally approved curriculum, as profit-seeking education entrepreneurs attracting parents with Western curricula and foreign teachers will no longer be interested in this sector.

Based on my observations of two prestigious private kindergartens in Shanghai, both using bilingual English-Mandarin curricula, I posit that until the academic year 2017-2018 Beijing's lax attitude towards private ECE created a fertile ground for increased parental agency, with parents' preferences being taken into consideration for curriculum development (Kim and Fram 2009). From their positioning as consumers of preschool services (Katz 1993), parents increasingly feel they are entitled to influence their children's education (Lin 2007). On the other hand, the Centre is adamant for the 12 core socialist values to be included in all curricula at all age levels (Zhang and Yao 2013), with an age-appropriate values and citizenship education content to be universalised in any ECE setting. The dominant discourse is pushing for the cultivation of patriotic individuals who know about China's traditional culture, goal I discovered is shared, at least superficially, by both the Chinese teaching staff and parents from the five observed kindergartens, who were careful to come across as politically correct during interviews and in parent questionnaires.

In high income places like Scandinavia, France and Italy universal preschool education is provided by the state (Cochran 2011). As China is an emerging market economy it cannot yet fully compete with such high standards for ensuring children's well-being from the earliest stage in life, but it is moving in the right direction in terms of investing in more public kindergartens and encouraging the private sector to build private preschools. Even though ECE is not part of compulsory education, which so far covers nine years of schooling, from primary school to middle school,ⁱⁱⁱ by implementing a high-reaching national strategy one year of preschool should have become universal by 2020. The 2010 Development Plan listed nationwide ECE goals to be accomplished in the next decade and defined ECE as a vital element in the construction of a harmonious society (Qi and Melhuish 2016). Thus far, I could not find any data which would corroborate whether this was accomplished nation-wide, but three years of kindergarten enrolment were a fait accompli for Shanghai residents well before 2020, according to both the local education officials I spoke with (EO1; EO2; EO3) and the latest Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (STYAP 2018-2020).

Of interest is that even though the 2010 documents define preschool education as an integral part of education and as 'social welfare' (Liu and Pan 2013), the same legislation delegated the interpretation and implementation of the new guidelines to local governments, who were left to find the resources needed to meet the demanding 2020 targets, a clear sign of decentralisation shaping ECE. I argue that, as not all local education bureaus across China have the tools to bring these lofty goals to fruition the Centre-driven strategy of making ECE accessible to the ordinary Chinese by 2020 was fated to fail in practice. In other words, as there is a penury of public and private kindergartens, trained teachers, and local funds for ECE throughout the country (except for tier one cities), it was virtually impossible to provide one year of universal preschool education by 2020 (Liu and Pan 2013), especially in poorer provinces where local education budgets target compulsory education. While this national ECE strategy was on a collision path with the existing economic and social realities in most of China, and some Chinese scholars interpret it as the Centre's populist response to increasingly vocal societal demands for improved preschool provisions (Qin 2017), Shanghai is an exception where most of the 2020 goals had already been achieved by 2018. However, this happened not because of a Beijing-driven approach, but because of the particular environment of this municipality, especially its historical pursuit of educational excellence and privileged economic situation, which ensured a high-level of ECE (EO1; EE6). The example par excellence is the visionary STYAPs, with the first round being implemented between 2006 and 2008, years before the 2010 Education Reform.

Until recently, nationwide private kindergarten curricula catering to the elite (often with a strong English component) was based on the imitation of Western ECE patterns, and private schools were given total freedom over their teaching methods and syllabi (Huo 2015). Since

2010, the government is pushing for the inclusion of a socialist core of instruction at every age level and education sector, including private schools (Chen 2016). As parents have more to say regarding their children's education in a private institution, partially a consequence of the community-based approach towards kindergartens (Cai and Feng 2015) and mostly because they pay high tuition fees, they want the curriculum to foster internationally marketable skills like English and creativity, to the detriment of the Soviet model of teacher-driven instruction (Hu et al. 2016).

This thesis posits that the recent official rhetoric of enforcing the homogenous dissemination of moral education is the result of a nationalist revival led by Xi Jinping (i.e. Xi's speech at the 19th National Congress), driven by the central government's fear that education institutions became incubators for what Beijing labels as 'Western thinking' and successfully shape young individuals into contesting socialist ideology (Fish 2017). Starting with 1978, the national ECE strategy allowed the pure imitation of successful Western models (Huo 2015) in both public and private kindergartens. However, with the 19th National Congress, the Centre realised that this strategy opened the door for the uncontrollable dissemination of foreign narratives like the dissemination of liberal values in critical thinking patterns for ECE, which pose a threat to its blend of Marxist and traditional Chinese culture-shaped discourse. Even though the approach was to decontextualise Western curricula from their underlying liberal ideology (Tobin et al. 2009), their cultural legacy proved to be pervasive. For example, in the case of senior class kindergarten children (5-6-year-olds), my ethnographic work has shown that many do not differentiate between Chinese and Western celebrations, giving rise to a de facto syncretism between the most important Western holidays and their associated rites, on the one hand, and Chinese festivals and traditions, on the other. This phenomenon reflects Shanghai's cosmopolitan identity, at least among its socio-economic elite, and illustrates the porosity and malleability of culture, as foreign cultural practices are assimilated into local culture and become something new. Moreover, it is critical to mention that when I operate with artificially constructed categories like 'Western,' 'Chinese,' and 'Shanghai' culture I do so for the sake of condensing the analysis and for operational organisation, but 'culture' can by no means be contained by oversimplifications and stereotypes.

Since its inception, the Xi Jinping administration has envisaged more control of local governments and institutions, arguing that administrative centralisation would discipline the Party and generate a sound market economy (Kojima 2020). Underpinning this political direction is the Centre-driven narrative of a strong leader, codified through the removal of the presidential term limit and the inclusion of Xi Jinping Thought ratified in the Chinese constitution in early 2018 (Garrick and Bennett 2018). Under Xi's leadership another form of centralisation is increased ideological control (Kojima 2020: 7) and the dissemination of nationalism, which is also starting to shape education. I argue that the Centre is taking a stronger interest in weeding out 'Western' elements out of Chinese education, even at kindergarten level. This shift has been felt since October 2017, with the reverberations of the 19th National Congress making many kindergartens in Shanghai shun 'pure' Western festivals like Christmas, or at least imbue them with as many Chinese cultural elements as possible.

Even prior to the 2010 Education Reform, Tobin et al. (2009) noticed that the practice of simply imitating successful Western patterns in ECE had started to change, but the trend became more evident after the reform. In the case of Shanghai, for example, educators started to experiment with patterns that reflect local cultural and socio-political milieus and that can develop to be on par with successful international ECE pedagogies (EE7). This phenomenon is spearheaded by demonstration kindergartens, the highest-ranked public kindergartens in China (like Public1 kindergarten), politics that encourage cutting-edge ECE research and that have the Centre's full support, including plenty of funding and the most qualified teaching staff. China's national strategy is to push for innovation and the creation of a harmonious

society built on a sustainable workforce that is competitive internationally. Since the 2006 *National Conference on Science and Technology*, when Hu Jintao set the goal of reinforcing and advancing China's position as one of the winners of globalisation, a succession of supportive policies was issued, also targeting ECE. The 2010 ECE policies are testament to the Centre's realisation that, if China is to become a driver of globalisation, it needs to invest in its education.

While the 2010 *Guidelines* define preschool education as a part of welfare (Liu and Pan 2013) I wanted to see if this is indeed the reality by looking at socialisation strategies in different Shanghai districts and their preschool services, like affordable tuition fees, quality education and inclusive private kindergartens. To deepen the analysis of why the official rhetoric and supporting policies have been preoccupied with ECE since 2010, I also tackle the 2016 *Law on Private Education*, as well as the 2020 *Law on the Protection of Minors*, both stipulating the need for patriotic education with the inclusion of a core socialist values curriculum at all stages of education. For example, the latter document's Article 5 stipulates that "*the State, society, schools, and families shall educate minors on [...] patriotism, collectivism, and socialism with Chinese characteristics; [...] rejecting erosion by corrosive ideologies such as capitalism [...] and leading minors to establish and practice the core socialist values.*" This research looks at how these new policies affect the evolution of Chinese ECE in both public and private kindergartens, especially whether there is increased governmental control over their curricula and teaching patterns, and how this is exerted. While the Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) and local education bureaus continue to have limited control over the curricula of private kindergartens, my fieldwork has revealed there already are restrictions in place regarding the dissemination of 'Western' culture, especially the celebration of holidays like Christmas, and an increased focus on traditional Chinese culture and patriotism.

The State has been strongly encouraging communities and private individuals to get involved in the preschool sector (Cai and Feng 2015). My research sheds light on the interactions between parents and teachers and the official rhetoric on preschool curricula, especially in terms of the values that are disseminated to senior class kindergarten children. Hence, in public kindergartens, parents are encouraged to participate in activities as long as they align themselves with the kindergarten's values. As the principal has the final say in every kindergarten endeavour, and as she is the guardian of official discourse demands (ME5), 'socialisation' means that parents, devoid of agency, are subjects performing according to what is asked of them. In the private kindergarten sector 'socialisation' means that, in the case of bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens, 'Western' curricula and teaching patterns can be used and 'Western' cultural immersion is achieved via the employment of native English teachers, in order to cater to the parents' preferences. However, even in this setting, my ethnographic research shows that the dissemination of values and citizenship education remains strong because of the Chinese staff, and that the Centre is starting to exert more control over the educational agenda.

A 2013 document issued by the General Office of the CCP Central Committee specified that "*core socialist values should be incorporated into the curriculum and classrooms and made a way of thinking for students*" (Zhang and Yao 2013). At present, they are part of the citizenship education provided at all levels of public education, from preschool to university. The guidelines strongly encourage the media to actively promote these values, alongside the kindergartens' daily patriotic activities like raising the national flag and singing the anthem, as well as focusing more on the celebration of traditional Chinese festivals. The Party's stand on the integration of socialist ideology into the Education Reform is best captured by Xie Chuntao, a professor at the Party School of the CCP Central Committee, who argues that "*cultivating and practising core socialist values should be incorporated into China's overall national*

education plan, enabling everyone to understand and uphold the values and practise them consciously” (Zhang and Yao 2013).

1.2 Literature positioning

This research contributes to the existing body of literature on ECE by shedding light on the contemporary situation of ECE in China in terms of legislation and curriculum and pattern content, in general, and values and citizenship education, in particular. By comparing five elite public and private kindergartens in terms of the dissemination of patriotic and ‘Western’ narratives I paint a detailed picture of preschool education in Shanghai, with my fieldwork focusing on the changes that have been taking place since the 19th National Congress of October 2017. From this point of view, this thesis is a comparative study on early education that contributes to the advancement, transfer and sharing of knowledge in the field, not only to a Chinese audience, but also internationally.

By using Foucault’s power theory (1969; 1980; 1983; 1991; 2003; 2008), but not limiting myself to the application of positive power (in this thesis disciplinary power and biopower), but also looking at negative (sovereign) power, I address the question of how the interplay between globalisation and localisation has been shaping ECE in Shanghai since the 2010 Education Reform, how and why ECE legislation and informal Centre-driven demands are pushing for more patriotic ethos in early education since 2017, and how effective this strategy has been in disseminating core socialist values in public and private kindergartens. My approach applies a Foucauldian lens to understand and interpret the inputs, processes, and outcomes of various ECE policies shaping leading kindergartens in Shanghai since 2010, thus capturing the particularities of the Chinese case. Aware of my positionality as a Western researcher I strove to move beyond a subjective frame of reference by being sensitive to the cultural embeddedness of the observed preschools. As a result of the experience I gained while working as an educator at various Shanghainese kindergartens, combined with a year of ethnographic research at both public and private preschools I am able to showcase an informed perspective on the current drivers of ECE development in the city, as well as provide insight into the five observed kindergartens’ positioning and motives for mirroring and resisting the national strategy of promoting core socialist values to advance a harmonious society (Mu 2014).

This perspective reflects the sociocultural situatedness of the 2010 Education Reform and its consequent STYAPs, as it looks at both the discursive level – by analysing legislation, and a plurality of Shanghainese narratives captured via my ethnographic work. Thus, I engage with notions of ‘nationhood’ (e.g. Vickers 2021; Harrison 2001) and ‘culture’ (Tobin et al. 2009; Giddens 2013) to understand how the Centre is reinforcing its control over ECE, both at legislative level and at individual level, while also using Foucault’s disciplinary power approach to capture subjects’ internalisation of and resistance to the dissemination of values and citizenship education. Throughout the academic year 2017-2018 I observed the cultural and pedagogical values underpinning everyday practices and activities in three elite public kindergartens and two renowned private ones, the latter having a bilingual Mandarin-English stream. Moreover, I analysed their celebration of four major cultural festivals, namely China’s National Day and the Spring Festival as case studies for performing patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, and Halloween and Christmas as representative constructs of popular ‘Western’ cultural practices. My aim was to also shed light on how the interplay between narratives of ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Westernness’ are constantly transforming kindergarten education and individual subjects in Shanghai, as well as why the Centre’s dominant discourse has been so keen on promoting patriotism after the 2010 Education Reform, and especially since the 2017 19th NCCCP.

In line with Vickers (2021), China uses nationalism as a tool to try and forge a cohesive narrative of modern ‘Chineseness,’ and thus overcome the struggles posed by its imperialist past. As follows, Chinese nationalism is constructing “*a single national community, attempting to bind its subordinate parts more closely to the centre, while redefining imperial subjects as national citizens*” (Vickers 2021: 47). However, because of the cultural and ethnic diversity it is aiming at homogenising and its various target audiences, the dominant discourse continues to retain coexisting but incompatible definitions of ‘Chineseness,’ like emphasising a common, Han^{iv} ancestry for the Han majority, and inter-ethnic brotherhood between Han and other ethnic groups, when addressing minorities (Ibid.).

There is a scarcity of literature in English on the situation of ECE in China since the revolutionary 2010 Reform, and it is even more acute in assessing the situation of kindergartens since October 2017. The most relevant articles I found mostly tackle the historical development of ECE (e.g. Qi and Melhuish 2016; Huo et al. 2015), without in-depth analyses of the latest legislative milieu, like the succession of municipal and district three-year action plans implemented at provincial level after 2010. Such studies are mainly descriptive and oftentimes apolitical, failing to make a connection between education, culture, and power. Hence, my aim is to focus on what both the policies and realities of ECE say about power dynamics in China, in particular Shanghai, by analysing how patriotic education is shaping of young Chinese subjects.

More substantial contributions are on the topics of parents, educators, and kindergarten principals’ views on contemporary ECE, like the articles of Luo et al. (2013), and Hu and Jeong (2016). In addition, there is good range of comparative ethnographic case studies, but they only provide limited insight into what kindergarten education is like in China (e.g. Tang and Maxwell 2007). A recent book on China’s educational development starting with the Reform Era is Vickers and Zeng’s *Education and Society in Post-Maoist China* (2017). While it provides an insightful analysis of all stages of education and the connection between education and power, it only addresses ECE in one chapter, “Early Childhood Education and Care,” which takes a preponderantly historical approach to this education sector.

To keep informed about the most recent developments regarding ECE I accessed articles from official online newspapers like People’s Daily, China Daily, and Xinhua News, which reflect the official rhetoric. Regarding policy content and the implementation of the STYAPs, as well as the current situation of kindergartens in Shanghai, I used primary data sources like documents published by the Ministry of Education, the China State Council and the SEB and district education bureaus, as well as interviewed three education officials. These sources form the foundation for answering one of my research questions, namely how and why are kindergartens in Shanghai - defined as social spaces of identity formation where subjects negotiate with the Centre’s homogenising power - losing their capacity for agency, at least in their official narratives, and what this recent development means for power dynamics in China.

Tackling moral education in Chinese preschools, but specifically dealing with the ethical question of what makes a child ‘good,’ so the *xue zuoren* (学做人) or ‘learning to be human’ core value of Confucian thought is Jing Xu’s 2014 article, “Becoming a Moral Child amidst China’s Moral Crisis: Preschool Discourse and Practices of Sharing in Shanghai.” The ensuing book, *The Good Child: Moral Development in a Chinese Preschool* (2017), was published during my year of ethnographic work and was a great inspiration. However, Xu only observed one private kindergarten in Shanghai, while my study is much wider in scope, providing a comparative approach between three public and two private kindergartens. Another recent article is Périard and Liu’s “Moral Education in a Shanghai Kindergarten – How Do Children Perceive Social Values and Norms?” (2020), which also only focuses on the *zuoren* dimension of moral education. Its corresponding book, *Where Culture Grows. Social Ecology of a Chinese Kindergarten* (Xu and Marsico 2020) compiles a collection of articles looking at

Shanghai kindergartens from a cultural psychology perspective, taking a mostly ethnographic approach to various case studies of child socialisation (e.g. Meng and Heuschkel 2020; Orozco 2020; Eimer 2020; Eimer, Aleksic et al. 2020).

However, while I am also interested in moral education in Shanghai preschools, I do not engage with ethical questions, but with the dissemination of patriotic education, which I see as the Centre's tactic, exacerbated under Xi's leadership, of ensuring the cultivation of patriotic individuals who owe their allegiance to the motherland and the Party. While there is some scholarship about nationalism and education in China (Gries and Friedman 2004; Hughes 2006; Wang 2012; Vickers 2021; 2022), there is little research on patriotic education in kindergartens and the current political goals a cohesive and comprehensive values and citizenship education discourse is advancing, which is what this dissertation contributes to.

Canon literature using an anthropological approach to education in China are the studies of Tobin et al. (1989; 2009), Hansen (2015), and Woronov (2016). In the case of Tobin et al. (1989; 2009), Dagan Kindergarten in Kunming, Yunnan Province, is observed on and off during a two-decade period (1985-2003), with the researchers being able to pinpoint both change and transformation and connect kindergarten life with larger societal changes in China. Another book that looks at the connection between culture, society and power is Terry Woronov's 2016 *Class Work: Vocational Schools and China's Urban Youth*. The author spent time with two vocational schools in Nanjing and got to know the pupils, their parents, and their teachers, in order to understand the Chinese stereotype of labelling vocational students as 'failures,' and come up with her theory of 'numeric capital,' as "*commonsense logic in China tends to equate exam results with an individual's moral and personal value*" (Woronov 2016: 8). Mette Hansen's *Educating the Chinese Individual: Life in a Rural High School* (2015) adds a rural dimension to ethnographies on education in China, as it draws on his fieldwork in a rural high school in Zhejiang.

There is still a significant gap in the literature on ECE in China, making it difficult for academics who do not read Mandarin to grasp the realities of Chinese preschool education beyond generalities regarding policy content and the challenges outlined by the dominant discourse in official documents. Noteworthy exceptions are the key works of Rao et al. - *Early Chinese Education in Chinese Societies* (2017), as well as Tobin et al.'s *Preschools in Three Cultures Revisited: China, Japan and the US* (2009). These two pioneering studies apply an anthropological approach to ECE and provided me with the conceptual foundation for my own fieldwork. However, they predate the current study in terms of the data they rely on, making this comparative approach to public and private kindergartens in Shanghai a much-needed addition to the field. By using a multitude of methods ranging from ethnographic work based on observations of major kindergarten cultural events and parent questionnaires to interviews with officials, teachers, and kindergarten principals, I analyse the dissemination of both values and citizenship education in preschools, as well as the Centre's increasing demands for these ECE policies to limit the spread of 'Western' cultural practices, which is seen as threatening the conformity of patriotic education.

1.3 Purpose statement, research question, terminology, and chapter structure

This study draws on the notion of values and citizenship education as both a political ideology and part of the school curriculum (Heater 2004) and analyses its effects by conducting observations during four festivals – two 'Western' and two local, in various elite public and private kindergartens in Shanghai, as well as by carrying out interviews with ECE professionals and experts. I use the term 'values and citizenship education' not to refer to what is traditionally

called ‘moral education’ (*sixiang pinde* 思想品德), as my term is narrower in scope and targets only the ways patriotic elements like the 12 core socialist values are disseminated in a kindergarten setting. The Confucian concept of moral education as *xue zuoren* (学做人) or an individual’s self-fulfilment in terms of moral cultivation is brilliantly explored by Jing Xu in her book, *The Good Child* (2017), where she offers an ethnographic analysis of a private middle-class kindergarten in Shanghai and the ways children create their own moral practices (2017). This dissertation does not attempt to understand how young children are shaped by patriotic education by using psychology as an analytical lens, and only superficially applies an anthropological approach (for example in vignettes of cultural practices), but instead uses Foucault’s power theory to grasp the plurality of narratives shaping individuals – principals, teachers, parents, and children – in a kindergarten setting.

My concept facilitates the comparison of the dissemination and internalisation of what the Centre defines as ‘socialist’ and ‘Western’ values, as I am interested in the analysis of discourses which promote ‘Chineseness,’ rather than ethical codes of conduct enforced in kindergartens. Citizenship education aims at constructing patriotic citizens (Davies 2005), even though what is regarded as a ‘good citizen’ is subjective to a national discourse’s frame of reference. In this study I aim to explain why and how patriotic education is being propagated at preschool level, specifically whether the 12 core socialist values are incorporated in teaching patterns and curricula, as well as understand how they are defined in both national and local goals for ECE and the ways they impact kindergartens in Shanghai.

My research question engages with *how the interplay between globalisation and localisation has been shaping ECE in Shanghai since the 2010 Education Reform, how and why ECE legislation and informal centre-driven demands are pushing for more values and citizenship after the 19th National Congress, and how effective the Centre’s strategy has been in disseminating core socialist values in public and private kindergartens.*

I structure the chapters based on the principle of thematic spatiality (Starr 2005), as I first construct, then observe what I label to be ‘privileged spaces’ for analysing the dissemination of both local (socialist and traditional Chinese) and global (‘Western’) ECE narratives in Shanghainese kindergartens. I looked at the spaces of three public and two private kindergartens within their geographical constraints, but I also captured their permeable quality by factoring in the human element, namely the kindergarten staff, parents, and children, as well as local education officials and ECE experts.

The CCP has a clear political agenda behind the dissemination of national education in both public and private kindergartens, namely political socialisation (e.g. Vickers 2021). While until 2009 the regime encouraged the selective emulation of Western curricula and patterns as necessary for China to develop talent that would be competitive internationally, the so-called ‘Learning from Europe and America’ phase (Huo 2015), this approach started to change since Xi took power in 2012, as the dangers it posed to conformity became too great (Vickers 2021). Since, the dominant discourse has been prioritising patriotism and traditional Chinese culture over a more cosmopolitan, ‘global’ approach, whose dissemination of critical thinking skills might pose a danger to the cultivation of patriotic subjects who own their allegiance to the Party. Since 2018, Beijing has increased its efforts for an increasingly homogenous curricular delivery, as stipulated in new ECE legislation, which complements pre-existing teacher manuals authored and published by Shanghai Education Press, in the case of Shanghai. However, while the Centre is interested in standardisation as a means of controlling the output of knowledge, there is a parallel, but competing force that continues to shape ECE very strongly in a cosmopolitan city like Shanghai, namely market demands. As such, Shanghainese parents are interested in a more ‘Western’ education in terms of curricula and education in English delivered by native English teachers, which elite private kindergartens are catering to.

The question of how to best capture these forces while they are at play in the arena of ECE led me to narrow down the scope of my analysis to what I argue to be their most representative manifestations in a kindergarten setting, namely the celebration of Halloween and Christmas as expressions of ‘Western’ cultural practices with religious overtones (especially in the case of Christmas), and China’s National Day and the Spring Festival as phenomena of localisation and expressions of performative patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, respectively.

Culture is porous and cultural practices change over time and space, with the celebrations of Halloween and Christmas being no exception, especially since they are becoming increasingly popular in cosmopolitan areas across the globe (Santino 1983; Whiteley 2008), diffused and assimilated according to local particularities, as I also observed in the case of the five kindergartens whose celebrations I observed. While ‘Western’ traditions related to the same holiday also vary wildly in the geographical West, in the case of Christmas and Halloween celebrations in elite Shanghainese kindergartens I noticed the dissemination of mostly American narratives and their associated terminology and customs. However, these cultural constructs of ‘Westernness’ are at the same time being reshaped by local forces, infused with local flavour and become hybrid celebrations (see Chapters 6 and 7).

In the case of ‘Chineseness’ I look the Centre’s homogenising understanding of this artificial category, as it is being constructed in national and local legislation, as well as, to a smaller extent, in kindergarten curricula. However, I also add an ethnographic layer to my analysis by observing the celebration of local festivals, and how the Centre is actively demanding more cohesive cultural practices – as seem in almost identical activities for China’s National Day and the Spring Festival in all observed preschools (see Chapters 5 and 7). Beijing’s strategy is trying to forge a cohesive, monolithic understanding of Chinese culture, with performative acts facilitating young children’s internalisation of patriotic education, and thus legitimising the regime.

For a more structured operational organisation of the thesis, I decided to construct my analytical spaces thematically, within the parameters of a globalisation - localisation nexus. As follows, I operate with the term ‘globalisation’ according to Giddens’ (2013) definition, choosing to focus on its fifth dimension, culture, as expressed in the celebration of two ‘Western’ holidays, Halloween and Christmas. Throughout my research I rely on his definition of globalisation as “*the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa*” (Giddens 2013: 64). Applying this filter, the celebration of Halloween and Christmas-related cultural activities in the observed public and private kindergartens becomes a space for capturing Western popular culture and its interactions with local narratives.

The term ‘localisation’ addresses both traditional Chinese and socialist values, referring to both the Centre, Beijing, and its reaching arm, the SEB and local education districts and the dominant discourse they disseminate, as well as kindergarten-specific discourses in the locality of Shanghai. I decided on analysing China’s National Day as the example par excellence for capturing patriotic ethos in a kindergarten setting and assessing the Centre’s power over the propagation of socialist values, while the Spring and Lantern Festivals were selected as case studies for observing the celebration of traditional Chinese culture infused with patriotic elements.

In my Centre-Periphery system (Figure 1.1 [above](#)) the Centre is equated geographically with Beijing, while Beijing-driven legislation shapes the policies of local education bureaus, the latter being the ones exercising direct control over local kindergartens. The Periphery is occupied by private kindergartens, not just geographically (as the observed private kindergartens are located in new Shanghainese districts, with public kindergartens occupying the downtown) but also legally, still being mostly outside the local education bureaus’ control.

Public kindergartens, especially level one grade one (*yiji yilei* 一级一类) ones, are placed under the homogenising power of the Centre, controlled by both local education bureau legislation and having close ties with local Party branches.

I contend that, especially since late 2017, Beijing is becoming wary of the freedom given to the Periphery in terms of curricula and everyday activities, especially regarding content that it considers too liberal or religious in nature. Since the 19th National Congress and Xi’s political ideology enshrined in the country’s constitution, the celebration of Western holidays in Shanghai has seen more State control (ME5; PR1K22). Christmas, in particular, has seen increased censorship throughout China, as the Centre has started to look at this holiday as a potentially dangerous religious celebration that may be a contender to the CCP’s ideology (May 2018; Xu 2018).

Applying this spatial lens, I constructed three spaces of analysis (Table 1.2 below), as follows: the Centre as Space1, the space between the Centre and the Periphery as the Space-in-Between (Space2), and the Periphery as Space3. Space1 is Beijing and its reaching arms, the SEB and local education bureaus (Space1.1) that keep vigil over how ECE policies and regulations are being implemented in Shanghai, as well as the CCP local branches (Space1.2). This spatial model includes Party affiliation, as my fieldwork-collected data show that every observed kindergarten, be they public or private, had strong ties with the CCP: two of the three public kindergarten principals were confirmed Party members, while at least one member of staff from all five kindergartens was also a CCP member and in charge of ensuring that the kindergarten activities were aligned with Party ideology (ES4; PR1K20). Moreover, documents like the 2011 *Suggestions on Strengthening Party Building Work for Teachers in Public Kindergartens* or the 2018 *Kindergarten Party Branch Plan* leave no doubt that ECE is now seen as a key stage in education and that the Party sees it as its responsibility to guarantee that teachers are patriotic citizens who actively work at cultivating future patriotic citizens. Even though education is decentralised in China, I equate Beijing with the SEB and district education bureaus because the three local officials I interviewed mirrored the official narrative in terms of ideological alignment and goals for ECE, while the four rounds of STYAPS I analysed are also ideologically attuned to socialism with Chinese characteristics and the discourse of constructing patriotic citizens.

Table 1.2 Levels of analysis

1. Local forces represented by a Beijing-driven discourse (Space1 and Space2):

- The Centre (Space1) and the Space-in-Between of elite public kindergartens (Space2)
- Homogenising, Centre-led discourse
- promoting the “*strengthening of moral education to cultivate people*” (*lideshuren* 立德树人)
- Space2’s alignment with and occasional resistance to moral education

Levels of analysis:

- Nation-wide legislation and interviews with ECE academics
- SEB and local education bureaus: local legislation through four rounds of Shanghai Three-Year Action Plans (STYAPs) and interviews with three local education officials and two academics
- Public kindergarten management and their connection with the CCP, local education bureaus, and parents (local community) via interviews and local CP legislation

- Chinese teachers as ‘obedient bodies’/ pragmatic actors spreading socialist ideology to their pupils (interviews and observations); parents as subjects to the dominant discourse (parent questionnaires and observations)
- Weak societal agency in public kindergartens

2. Globalisation represented by Society-driven discourses (Space3):

- The Periphery of private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens
- Resistance and occasional negotiation with the dominant discourse
- Heterogenous discourses disseminating ‘Western’ culture through Western curricula and native English teachers

Levels of analysis:

- (Resistance) Strong societal agency in bilingual English-Mandarin private kindergartens; use of ‘Western’ curricula and native English teachers to create a ‘Western’ cultural immersion learning environment (critical thinking patterns and the celebration of Halloween and Christmas)
- (Resistance) Celebration of ‘Western’ festivals (Halloween and Christmas) according to an American narrative; based on observation, interviews with management and teachers and parent questionnaires
- (Negotiation) Perfunctory celebration of traditional Chinese (Spring Festival) and patriotic activities (China’s National Day); based on observation, interviews with management and teachers and parent questionnaires
- Increased societal agency in private kindergartens

Table 1. 2 Levels of analysis

I called the Space-in-Between the Centre and the Periphery Space2, where I placed the observed top public kindergartens, as they follow the approved SEB curriculum, but have a 20-30% original curriculum where they experiment with global curricula and teaching patterns, with the caveat they are devoid of any religious content. According to my research, I discovered that, within the borders of an elite public kindergarten the parents are subjects bowing to the power of the kindergarten principal. My ethnographic work and interview analysis strongly suggest that these parents have no potential for agency, nor do they exhibit much interest for it. The parent questionnaires show that these parents understood they had to conform with a rigid public kindergarten hierarchy and instead used their energy to prepare their children for primary school by enrolling them in extracurricular lessons. In Space2 the principals, who have close ties both with the SEB and local education bureaus, as well as with the CCP, have all the decision-making power (ME5). Hence, I posit that these kindergartens are shaped by the homogenising power of the Centre in terms of their values-based curriculum, striving to raise patriotic citizens who are in tune with their cultural heritage and are proud to be Chinese. The dissemination of this official rhetoric was especially clear in Public1 kindergarten, a leading demonstration kindergarten in Shanghai, as its entire curriculum is shaped by the motto “*Become a global citizen with a Chinese heart.*”

The third space is on the Periphery and is occupied by private kindergartens (Space3). I need to clarify that this analysis only considered top private kindergartens with a bilingual English-Mandarin stream catering to the socio-economic elite in Shanghai, excluding those preschools that enrol the children of migrant workers, for example. Hence, these famous private kindergartens target a well-off clientele that has the financial means to afford high tuition fees and that wants a non-mainstream education for their children. I presupposed this condition and demonstrated its validity with the parent questionnaires, namely that these parents enrol their children because they prioritise a ‘Western’ curriculum and bilingual education over the

homogenising curriculum offered in public kindergartens, but also because they sometimes fall short of the exclusivist entry requirements of level one public kindergartens. The parents here act as consumers and my assumption is that have the agency to influence kindergarten curricula, as well as teacher behaviour. Space3 is thus a privileged space for observing a society-driven discourse in favour of a more globalised curriculum, where liberal forces are given relatively free reign. However, I have noted an increasingly stronger control of the Centre since around the 19th National Congress in Private1, with semi-formal demands to disseminate more socialist and traditional Chinese values instead of ‘Western’ culture. These restrictions only reached Private2 in the academic year 2018-2019, as supported by my analysis of the kindergarten’s social media posts during that period and the scarcity of promoted Western festivals compared to the previous year.

When analysing the dominant discourse on ECE, which is Centre driven by Beijing and its local agents, the SEB and district education bureaus, as well as local CP branches, I considered nation-wide ECE policies and their implementation by local education bureaus via four rounds of tailored STYAPs, as well as the observed kindergartens’ ties with the Party and the presence of patriotic content like the core socialist values in the curriculum and special activities. For a deeper analysis, beyond merely looking at policy content complemented by interviews with local education officials, I also selected case studies where I could observe these policies at work, namely their manifestations in a kindergarten setting through curricula, teaching patterns, and holiday celebrations. In this instance I not only observed the celebration of China’s National Day and the Spring Festival, but also interviewed kindergarten principals, teaching staff and parents. This discourse shapes Space1 and Space2, as the three top public kindergartens I observed aligned ideologically with the Centre and their curricula focused on the dissemination of patriotic and traditional Chinese values, with the holidays of Halloween and Christmas being only superficially celebrated in Public1 and Public3, and not at all in Public2, the latter smartly integrating elements from both in its New Year event without attributing them to the two ‘Western’ festivals.

In terms of resistance to State control over ECE content, I equate it with parents and Western teachers’ agency on the Periphery, where I look at the dissemination of Western liberal values and related popular culture activities in private kindergartens. These private preschools are the only spaces where parents have the agency to influence what their children are learning because the Centre has little control over curricula and teaching patterns. Private kindergarten management develops and uses Western curricula (often tailored to also include some local, Shanghainese culture), and native English teachers as key selling points to attract well-off parents willing to pay high fees for their bilingual English-Mandarin programmes. A key reason why Beijing is still letting them operate as profit-driven politics is because of the increased demand for ECE, especially after the 2016 *Two-child policy*. However, I will demonstrate that this indifference shown by Space1 has been gradually changing towards increased control over the taught curriculum, as the dominant discourse has realised the importance of starting early in building patriotic citizens.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to capture State/Centre - society/Periphery power dynamics in Shanghai by comparing public and private kindergartens in terms of their respective values and citizenship education, as well as the dissemination and internalisation of what the CCP sees as dangerous ‘Western’ narratives, the latter captured in the kindergartens’ celebration of Halloween and Christmas. Moreover, I investigate how effective Space1 has been in nationalising ECE through its promotion of a patriotic core curriculum. To do this, I selected

and gained access to a total of five top preschools in Shanghai, three public and two private ones. The three public kindergartens are level one kindergartens, with Private1 being a leading demonstration preschool. The two private kindergartens are both prestigious names in Shanghai, with bilingual English-Mandarin streams, ‘Western’ curricula (Private1 is accredited to use the IB PYP curriculum, while Private2 is using its trademarked Philosophy for Children curriculum, shaped by the critical thinking pattern), and native English teachers.

The conducted fieldwork took place during the academic year 2017-2018 and covered the period around the 19th National Congress, the perfect time to assess the consequences of the 2010 Education Reform, coupled with four rounds of STYAPs on the dissemination of values and citizenship education in the five kindergartens. I also wanted to capture semi-formal demands to limit ‘Western’ cultural content in preschool curricula on the part of the Centre, acting through the SEB and local education bureaus, as well ties with local CCP branches. I not only analyse national and local ECE legislation, filtering for patriotic guidelines (what Foucault labels as negative, or judicial power), but also explore the extent to which they were being successfully implemented, assimilated and resisted by parents, teachers and children in public and private kindergartens (positive power acting as disciplinary power within the Panopticon of the observed preschools), as well as interpreted by local officials. Thus, this thesis aims at providing useful reflections that contribute to the understanding of the Centre’s current national strategy of using preschool education as an integral stepping stone in the creation of a harmonious society by cultivating patriotic citizens.

1.5 Empirical and theoretical contribution

In terms of an empirical contribution, the present work adds an important case study to the comparative literature on ECE, as I analyse the most recent policy developments in Shanghai by looking at legislation only accessible in Mandarin, conducting participant observation and interviews, and collecting parent questionnaires in public and private kindergartens over the October 2017- June 2018 period. There is a gap in literature regarding relevant quality publications in English on ECE in China, given the difficulty of gathering and accessing primary sources, as well as conducting ethnographic research in kindergartens, which this thesis rectifies and makes a noteworthy contribution to.

From the perspective of ECE legislation, I was interested in understanding “*what appears to be valued by reform policies and initiatives, how these reflect, enrich, and contradict local pedagogical or cultural norms, and what these mean for the successful execution of the intended curriculum*” (Seah 2011: 162) in the five case studies. I assessed data on the implementation of the most relevant ECE policies for Shanghai since 2006, namely four rounds of STYAPs, at both district and kindergarten level. To achieve my goal, I stepped into the microcosm of Shanghai ECE by conducting ethnographic work, as well as parent questionnaires and interviews with education officials, experts, and kindergarten management and teaching staff. These avenues of inquiry have shed light on how the interplay between globalisation, as expressed through the celebration of Halloween and Christmas, and localisation, captured through China’s National Day and the Spring Festival as cases for patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, is constructing ECE within the spatiality of the observed kindergartens.

Conducting observation in these preschools also enabled me to see how management, parents and Chinese and Western teachers are being shaped by these two forces, and what sort of narratives these subjects disseminate and internalise. I wanted to understand if parents are advocating for more control over their children’s education and how they are negotiating with the homogenising influence of the dominant discourse within the locality of their children’s

kindergarten. I used the same approach to assess the level of agency of both Chinese and Western teachers regarding the dissemination of patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, on the one hand, and 'Western' culture, on the other.

During one year of fieldwork, I investigated if the official rhetoric of national rejuvenation was simply propaganda, or if the measures of the STYAPs and the ECE directives from Beijing following the 19th National Congress were indeed implemented to ensure the homogenous diffusion of socialist ideology and traditional Chinese culture at preschool level. This inquiry makes a significant contribution to better understanding the current evolution of China's socio-political environment, and to what extent the country is turning towards constructing a homogenous society of socialist citizens and its implications for China as a global actor.

As to a theoretical contribution, the current thesis has a twofold purpose. First, I applied the social theory of space and spatiality (Starr 2005; Clegg 2006) to construct kindergartens as spaces on the Periphery of the main discourse on education, which focuses on compulsory education, presupposing that parents can still negotiate with Space1's power over the teaching curricula and patterns. I labelled Space1 as the Centre and equated it with Beijing exerting power via national ECE legislation, and included its reaching arm at the local level, namely the Shanghai and district Education Bureaus (Space1.1) and district Party branches (Space1.2), the latter working to see Beijing's vision come to fruition, namely the creation of a moral society of patriotic citizens. Given that local ECE legislation, like the four rounds of STYAPs I analysed, exerts a strong control over public kindergarten curricula, especially the cultural content they propagate, I place them in between the Centre and the Periphery (Space2). Moreover, the parents of the three public kindergartens I observed, as well as the teaching staff I interviewed all agreed that parents have no agency regarding what their children are learning, their only input being through volunteering to help the class teachers with events. As the three principals and six senior class teachers (teaching children aged 5-6) ideologically aligned with the Centre and emphasized their role as good educators responsible for nurturing new generations of patriots, I placed public kindergartens closer to the homogenising power of the dominant discourse, with resistance being constructed as the parents' agency in enrolling their children in extracurricular activities like English training centres and exposing them to Western festivals.

As for private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens, I located them on the periphery of the discourse on ECE, as both national and local ECE legislation still gives them significant leeway regarding their teaching content. In this spatiality, shaped by market forces, the parents are seen as consumers and thus retain their agency to influence curricula and teaching patterns, but only to the extent that they can select an already-formed product. Once they enrol their children into a kindergarten, they cannot influence the curriculum and only participate as volunteers during special activities. However, as they pay high tuition fees, they are a lot more demanding in terms of how their child should be treated, but this exertion of agency is not the object of this study. Regarding the dissemination of either local or global values they bow to the decision of the kindergarten principal and/or teachers, being in the same position as their counterparts in public kindergartens, retaining their agency in choosing their child's private lessons only. Chinese teachers here also mirror their counterparts in public kindergartens when asked patriotic questions, acting like obedient bodies (Foucault 1980; 1983 and 1991) repeating the official discourse. The foreign teachers, however, resist the Centre's demand for more patriotic and traditionalist content and the stifling of 'Western' cultural practices by not knowing about this request because of the language barrier or because they are ignored by management.

Secondly, I apply Foucault (1969; 1980; 1983 and 1991) to analyse power relations between the Centre and society within the spatial manifestation of kindergartens, reaching a

better understanding of how ordinary Chinese position themselves relative to the dominant discourse on values and citizenship education, on one hand, and Western holidays, on the other. My goal is to understand how and why Beijing is nationalising ECE by arguing for a modern education retaining Chinese characteristics while, after 2012 and with more pathos after 2017, it is also actively engaging in the process of stripping away Western cultural components from ECE curricula, as well as the kindergartens' responses. In both public and private kindergartens, but especially for the first category, the trend since the 19th NCCCP has been to include more patriotic education and to progressively oust Western cultural content, with local education bureaus taking a closer look at kindergartens. I analyse this situation in terms of Bentham's Panopticon (1995), an automatic functioning of power where education bureaus induce in the observed kindergartens a state of conscious visibility (Foucault 1991). I argue that, within this model, kindergartens are increasingly trying to exhibit the sanctioned behaviour expected by local education authorities, aware that the latter could be, for example, monitoring their social media posts at any given time, talking with parents, and collecting parent questionnaires, as well as conducting unannounced annual inspections.

This research aims at explaining whether, since the 2010 Education Reform, Beijing's strategy for nationalising ECE has been successful in promoting kindergarten education as a public good with a moral education core, to ensure the cultivation of young patriots. I posit that ECE curricula and teaching patterns are being shaped by two competing forces, socialism and traditional Chinese culture, on one hand, and 'Western' forces, on the other – an oversimplified binary relationship that in reality looks at multiple power relations between the Centre – Beijing and the observed kindergartens, where I analyse national and local legislation, kindergarten activities, and interviews with a diversity of subjects, from education officials to ECE teachers. Resistance to the homogenising dominant discourse was shown by the foreign staff, while the Chinese parents and teachers acted like obedient bodies within the Panopticon of the kindergarten. In both public and private kindergartens parents showed agency only outside the confines of the preschool, when choosing extracurricular activities like English for their children, as well as celebrating Halloween and Christmas at home, both carriers of 'Western' culture.

1.6 Conceptual grounding and methods

This analysis is conducted by applying Foucault's power and education lens to construct a thematic spatial relationship between the State (the Centre), public kindergartens (the Space-in-Between), and private kindergartens (the Periphery), constricted by the artificial boundaries of four festivals. The latter were selected for observation based on the researcher's assumption that they are privileged windows into the interplay between globalisation - limited in this study to the celebration of Halloween and Christmas, and localisation, term encompassing Beijing's monolithic dominant discourse, as well as Shanghainese narratives.

I am employing Foucault's power theory (1969; 1980; 1983 and 1991) in the context of ECE in China in order to investigate if and how the interplay between localisation and globalisation affects patriotic discourses and resistance to them in a kindergarten setting and how both the *Spaces-in-Between* (public kindergarten) and *Spaces-on-the-Periphery* (private kindergartens) respond to the homogenising forces of the dominant discourse, under the latter's impetus for more patriotic and traditionalist ECE curricula and teaching patterns. This Foucauldian approach allowed me to look at the dynamic relationships between the Centre and Periphery by including a variety of actors and competing forces. I strove to capture the fluidity of processes that aim at homogenising patriotic education in public kindergartens, while constructing private kindergartens as privileged spaces on the periphery that retain - to an

increasingly limited extent - their capacity for agency in choosing ‘Western’ curricula and teaching patterns. This theoretical framework helped shed light on the intricate power relations between Beijing (Space1), with its SEB and local education bureaus (Space1.1), whose ECE policies are complemented by local CCP legislation and activities (Space1.2), and public (Space2) and private kindergartens (Space3), where management, staff, parents and teachers constitute the societal forces, both as individuals and as groups.

While Foucault was critical of the conceptualisation of power as mainly juridical (Foucault 1981) and introduced a new type of power, namely biopower (Foucault 2008; Kelly 2010), which operates in more subtle ways, the two coexist and overlap (Nadesan 2008: 6-7). Moreover, both negative (sovereign) and positive power (biopower) serve to legitimate the state and control its subjects. Biopower has the aim of producing social categories and ensuring conformity among the population, as well as normalising behaviour (Roach 2009). Hence, while Foucault is a French philosopher who did not engage with Asian examples to develop his understanding of power relations, I still decided to use his theoretical approach to better grasp the forces shaping patriotic education in China because of the varied analytical angles it provides me with.

As follows, a juridical power lens looks at the prohibitive function of a repressive state apparatus and allows me to analyse legislation at both national and local levels from the 2010 Education Reform onward, as well as make sense of the competing discourses shaping ECE policies: the Centre is promoting a cohesive, homogenising narrative of patriotic education, while local governments interpret the policy content, reshape it, and implement it according to local contexts. Accordingly, I look into the relationship between central and local governments in terms of shaping ECE not as being monolithic, but as having degrees of difference where there are spaces for innovation in response to local milieus, so biopower at work. Moreover, positive power as disciplinary power facilitated my understanding of how power operates more subtly and at individual level, but with the same goal of constructing subjects who share an ideology that legitimates the state, in this case, the rule of the CCP.

For Foucault, the subject is a social and historical construct, as it is a product of inescapable social and historical developments, or “*the different modes by which, in our culture human being are made subjects*” (1983: 208). The subject is no longer an autonomous “I,” but simply an object of analysis dominated by power relations, an analytical angle which makes sense in China’s authoritarian regime. In line with the author, forms of resistance to different forms of power are “*a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their points of application and the methods used*” (Foucault 1983: 211). As such, with the goal of understanding what is shaping Chinese ECE and how Chinese ECE is in turn shaping subjects, I selected elite kindergartens in Shanghai as privileged spaces of resistance, where I can observe the dissemination, internalisation, and resistance to narratives of pre-ordained categories, namely ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ values. As knowledge and power are two sides of the same coin for Foucault, by analysing these narratives I gain a deeper understanding of how subjects are constructed in a kindergarten setting.

Positive power is both disciplinary and discursive, with the first directed primarily against the body. Disciplinary power is designed to produce ‘docile bodies’ by infiltrates the body and psyche of the individual and transforming them into malleable and obedient subjects (Foucault 1981). The example par excellence of the exertion of disciplinary power is Bentham’s *Panopticon* (1995), which for Foucault is a good image of modern society as a whole. The disciplinary power of correctional institutions like the prison constructs every subject as a prisoner, because of the internalisation of prescribed rules sanctioning ‘normal’ or ‘desirable’ behaviour: everyone becomes their own guardian. Institutions, like schools and kindergartens, have significant effects on how we live in the world, and Foucault treats them as microcosms of broader phenomena, like control. I construct all five observed kindergartens

as subjected to a surveillance mechanism, where a disciplinary system subjugates the child's body and psyche, thus feeding the social order and advancing the functioning of the entire system of domination.

Within the spatiality of the five preschools this analysis differentiates between various actors, namely kindergarten management, with the power being concentrated in the hands of the principal, the teachers, and the parents. I show that public kindergarten parents are devoid of agency and private kindergarten ones resist the Centre through their preference for immersive 'Western' education. The Chinese teaching staff in both public and private preschools behaved like Foucauldian docile bodies, ascribing to a patriotic narrative, and mirroring the verbiage of the Centre, with those in the two private kindergartens I observed showing signs of resistance in their preference for a 'Western' curriculum taught in English. The only actors to fully resist Space1 were the foreign teachers, given their inability to speak Mandarin and not having been moulded as subjects of Chinese education. Given the limitations imposed on this research by my ethics approval, which prevented me from directly interacting with the children, I do not include them as a fourth dimension, but for superficial analyses of their classroom participation. However, during my observations of key festivals, I noticed that the senior class (five- and six-year-old) children's capacity for agency in public kindergartens was limited by a rigid and controlled educational setting, where the teacher remained the sole authority sanctioning behaviour and forms of expression. Children had a lot more freedom in the two private kindergartens I visited, both in terms of how they expressed themselves and in what they were allowed to do while at kindergarten.

I tackle the concept of "*strengthening moral education to cultivate people*" or *lideshuren* (立德树人), considered to be the ultimate programmatic task of education in China (Wang 2018), where the strengthening of moral education (*lide* 立德) has the three instances of "developing great virtue" (*mingdade*), "obeying social morality" (*shougongde*), and "upholding personal morals" (*yanside*) (Xue and Jian 2020). The term "cultivating people" (*shuren* 树人) is an umbrella term referring to different education instances for building patriotic citizens, from moral education to sports (Ibid.). In this thesis I look at how Space1 is operating to reach its aim of 'training socialist builders and successors' from the earliest stage of education, namely kindergarten, and focus on the ways "developing great virtue" works through the dissemination of patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, as well as the presence (or lack thereof) of the 12 core socialist values, which are part of the "obeying social morality" dimension. I analyse the interactions of the Centre and public and private kindergartens within the constraints of what I label 'values and citizenship education,' or the first two facets of moral education. As I am not interested in the Confucian 'making of a good person' (*zuoren*), I do not engage with the third instance, "keeping personal morals."

Thus, at a discursive level, I look for moral education-related content in key national and local ECE legislation, like the 2010 Education Reform and four rounds of STYAPs, and the way it is internalised and disseminated by various subjects, from local education officials and ECE experts to kindergarten personnel and parents. I also assess values and citizenship education in the spatiality of five Shanghainese kindergarten during four festivals and related activities, namely China's National Day, the Spring Festival, Halloween, and Christmas. These holidays were chosen to collect empirical data on the Centre's discourse and reactions to it, be it acquiescence or resistance from individual subjects. Spearheaded by Xi Jinping's neotraditionalism (Yang 2017) and using the ubiquitous phrase of "outstanding traditional culture" (*youxiu chuantong wenhua* 优秀传统文化), Space1 is encouraging traditionalism to permeate every sector of Chinese society, aiming for traditional moral virtues to mould societal expectations is a way that ensures the future of the CCP (Kubat 2018). Hence, I explore this spill over effect on ECE from recent efforts to include a socialist and traditionalist core in

compulsory education (Cao and Zhao 2019), as well as the Party's recent move to contain the spread of Western culture and replace it with a Chinese alternative.

Data collection and analysis for this study includes national and local (STYAPs) ECE legislation, interviews with local education officials, early education experts, kindergarten management and teachers, parent questionnaires, as well as observations of four key celebrations. By using between-method triangulation my aim was to provide a comprehensive picture of the power relations between a State-sanctioned early education values-based curriculum (sanctioned via legislation) - the politics of the Centre, how they are interpreted and implemented by select polities (three top public kindergartens and two prestigious private kindergartens in Shanghai), and the politics at play involving the human factor. Local education officials and public kindergarten management and parents support the dominant discourse, and private kindergarten management, foreign teachers and parents are places of resistance where liberal forces are still shaping kindergarten life.

1.7 Shanghai as a research focus

I chose Shanghai as the case study par excellence to analyse the development of ECE because this municipality has established itself as leading ECE trends in China, with some of the best kindergartens and research in the country (e.g. EO1; EE6). I contend that it is a showcase of future changes that will spill over into other localities in China. Shanghai is a leading Chinese metropolis for a variety of reasons, from its sheer population size and socioeconomic diversity to its cultural distinctiveness and popularity with Western audiences. The most populous city in China, as well as the largest city proper in the world, with an estimated demographic of just over 27 million in 2020 (World Population Review, accessed on 5 Jan. 2021), Shanghai is an iconic metropolis and a major financial centre, as well as a privileged locus to observe China's most dramatic social transformations. For many, mostly as an effect of the dominant discourse's efficiency in selling this image both nationally and internationally, Shanghai represents the epitome of Chinese success, a definite winner of globalisation. Hence, the best way to understand China's pulse, both economically and socially, is to grasp the workings of this vanguard city.

In line with informant Carol from the Shanghai Media Group, a seasoned journalist covering stories on local kindergartens, "*Shanghai is one of the most developed cities in China and its ECE has an international perspective. If you want to know where China is heading with its ECE, you need to look at our best local kindergartens*" (ME5). Following her advice, I gained access to three grade one level one public kindergartens, including one of the best demonstration kindergartens in Shanghai, as well as two elite private kindergartens, and observed them throughout an entire academic year. Consequently, this thesis provides unique comparative insight into cutting-edge ECE practices in Shanghai, as well as responses from the local socioeconomic elite vis-à-vis kindergarten expectations.

1.8 Overview of the dissertation chapters

Given the word constraints of this thesis, the chapters overview is only briefly penned, with every chapter having detailed sections on all the steps taken to deliver an informed analysis. Thus, their respective introductions and conclusions highlight a different facet of the research question, anchoring the chapter both theoretically and methodologically.

The Literature Review is structured into a two-part comparison between international, especially European, perspectives on ECE, and Chinese views. In order to acquire a global

understanding of ECE I first used Cochran's (2011) conceptual framework to shed light on the drivers of ECE in representative Western countries, then compared and contrasted them with the Chinese case. This cross-national approach, *International Perspectives on ECE*, divides ECE programmes and goals into six policy domains, constructing an interconnected perspective on global ECE dynamics and the situation in China, as follows: (1) national goals, (2) ECE patterns (my preferred term to the traditional 'pedagogies'), (3) curricula, (4) parental involvement, (5) teacher preparation, and (6) kindergarten-primary school linkages. Then, in the part entitled *Chinese Perspectives on ECE - A Cinderella story*, I looked at the country's ECE legislative reforms and the financial system, with focus on the 2010 Education Reform. This subchapter analyses social, political, and economic development, interests and demands of the public, and international influences (Qi and Melhuish 2016) to provide a complex understanding of preschool education in China. It comprises of four analytical dimensions, (1) national goals, (2) patterns and curricula, (3) the current situation of ECE and (4) the financial system.

The methodological chapter provides insight into my research goal, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations and limitations. To understand the role of values and citizenship education as an integral part of ECE in constructing new generations of patriotic citizens I conducted observation during relevant cultural events at five leading kindergartens in Shanghai, collected 188 parent questionnaires, as well as carried out 25 semi-structured interviews with educators and ECE officials and experts. Homogenous purposive sampling was used to select three level one grade one public kindergartens and two prestigious private ones, while my pre-existing network of local connections, formed while working as a kindergarten teacher in Shanghai, was essential in getting past kindergarten gatekeepers. I succeeded in reaching theoretical sufficiency (Dey 1999) in my interviews and observations of kindergarten activities.

Applying a Centre-Periphery lens I organised my findings into four chapters, with Space1 – the Centre and its legislative control over kindergartens discussed in chapter 4, public kindergartens' alignment and negotiation with the dominant discourse tackled in chapters 5 and 6, respectively, and the resistance of private kindergarten examined in chapter 7. In every results chapter I drew on the structure Walt and Gilson used in their 1994 article on policy analysis, engaging with legislative content, key actors, processes, and context to answer different aspects of my research question.

Chapter 4, "The Centre's Legislative Control over ECE," looks at the dominant discourse on ECE, particularly the control legislation exerts over kindergarten curricula and teaching patterns in terms of the dissemination of moral education. Applying the filter of values and citizenship education I address its continuity in national legislation since the 2010 Education Reform, as well as its interpretation and implementation at local level through four rounds of Shanghai Three-Year Action Plans (STYAPs). I complement this multifaceted picture of ECE policies by also looking at the influence local CCP branches (Space1.2) exert over kindergarten management and teaching staff and their intensified efforts since 2018 (a consequence of the 19th National Congress) to nurture a patriotic staff.

In the next chapter, "The Centre's Control over the In-Between Space of Public Kindergartens," my goal is to assess the strategy and effectiveness of Space1's control over the dissemination of a patriotic discourse in the three level one public kindergarten chosen for observation, especially after the 19th NCCCP. I operate with two main spaces of analysis, the Centre and the Space-in-Between of public kindergartens (Space2), tackling what I construct to be the most important areas where Space1, working through the SEB and local Party branches, exerts its control. Hence, I address (1) enrolment, ranking and fees, (2) kindergarten behaviour in response to the *shijiuda*, especially the (3) dissemination of the 12 core socialist values through kindergarten curricula, and the case studies of (4) performing patriotism through

China's National Day and (5) performing traditional Chinese culture through the Spring Festival. I argue that, within Space2's borders, Beijing's homogenising discourse ensures both management and teaching staff behave as Foucauldian 'obedient bodies' shaped by disciplinary power, promoting values and citizenship education in their celebration of China's National Day and Spring Festival.

Chapter 6, "Counter-Discourses from Public Kindergartens" complements the ideological alignment and politically correct behaviour discussed in the previous chapter by looking at how Space2 is negotiating with the Centre to celebrate what I label as the most representative Western festivals (and carriers of Western liberal culture), namely Halloween and Christmas. All three leading public kindergartens I observed celebrated at least one ritual specific to either Halloween or Christmas, such as a dress up parade, trimming a Christmas tree, or Santa bringing the children gifts. However, I demonstrate how they purposefully underrated their importance by not promoting them on social media or by infusing them with Chinese elements to make them palatable to Space1.

In the final findings chapter, entitled "The Periphery as a Space of Resistance," I construct private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens as spaces on the margin of the homogenising dominant discourse, becoming privileged spaces where parents and native English teachers negotiate with and resist the Centre's recent push for values and citizenship education. The case studies used for assessing the presence of moral education in Space3 are China's National Day and the Spring Festival, while for expressions of 'Western' values I observed Christmas and Halloween-related activities. My assessment is that elite private kindergartens still have a lot of freedom in choosing their curricula and teaching patterns, mostly because of the parents' preference for Western cultural immersion programmes and the agency of native English speakers. Nevertheless, since the 19th National Congress, Space1 has increased its efforts to ensure that private kindergarten curricula contain a moral education core to aid in the cultivation of patriotic citizens.

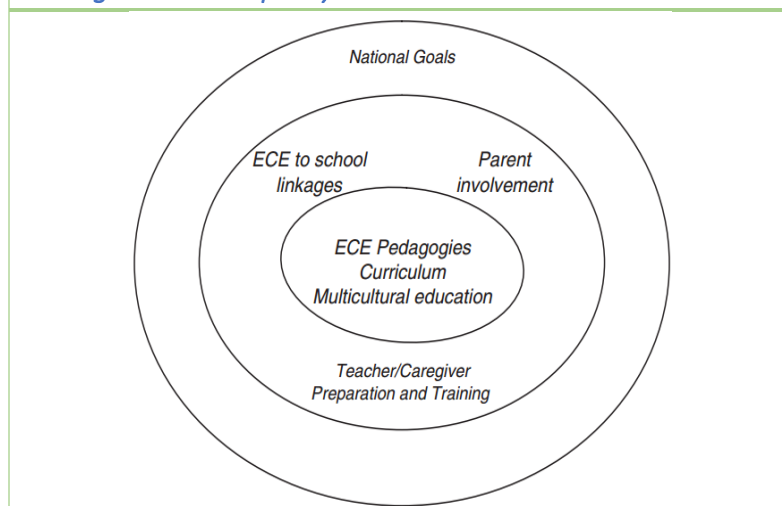
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Literature review overview

This literature review provides a comparison between international, especially European, perspectives on ECE and the Chinese case. To acquire a global understanding of ECE I first shed light on its drivers in representative Western countries, then contrast them with the situation in China. This cross-national approach situates my research within the greater body of ECE literature, contextualising Chinese ECE within the international debate. Inspired by Tobin et al.'s anthropological approach to ECE, where the authors compare preschools in the USA, China, and Japan (1989; 2009), I decided to focus on successful Western countries as the counterweight to my China analysis. My reasoning for not including a comparative section between China and Japan, for example, was that ECE policies in China were, between 1978 and 2009, mainly shaped by the imitation of American and European patterns (Huo 2015), and that the private Shanghainese kindergartens I observed also use 'Western' curricula. Moreover, the three elite public preschools I studied are also engaging with renowned 'Western' ECE patterns, but are adapting them to local needs, thus forging hybrid curricula and pedagogies. Given that an insightful comparative study on preschools in Japan and in China already exists (e.g. Tobin et al. 2009), combined with the word constraints of this thesis, I decided to sacrifice a comparative approach to East Asian models in favour of developing my findings chapters.

The structure of my analysis is shaped by Cochran's 2011 "International Perspectives on ECE" article, chosen for its clear and concise conceptual framework. Thus, by dividing ECE programmes and goals into six policy domains (Figure 2.1 below), I construct a relevant, interconnected perspective on global and local (Chinese) ECE dynamics that is easily accessible to everyone. My literature review is structured around the dimensions of (1) national goals, (2) ECE patterns (or pedagogies), (3) curricula, (4) parental involvement, (5) teacher preparation, and (6) preschool-primary school linkages. These categories make the most sense for my analysis, as each facet acts as a different lens for answering my research question, namely how the interplay between globalisation and localisation has been shaping ECE since the 2010 Education Reform, how and why ECE legislation and informal Centre-driven demands are pushing for more values and citizenship education since 2017, and how effective this strategy has been in disseminating core socialist values in public and private kindergartens.

Figure 2.1 ECE policy domains in nested relations



Source: Cochran (2011), 69

Figure 2.1 ECE policy domains

Section one, *International perspectives on ECE*, clarifies why ‘Western’ nations invest in ECE services^v and how they come to define their policy goals and programmes, each of the six categories being scrutinised in a subsection with the same name. Moreover, I compare them with the Chinese case, drawing on data from canon studies on Chinese ECE, as well as my fieldwork at five public and private Shanghainese kindergartens during the academic year 2017-2018. I also provide an in-depth analysis of Chinese ECE in the *Chinese perspectives* subchapter, where I tackle its historical development and financial underpinnings.

In the *national goals* part, I look at economic systems, culture, socio-political ideologies, and national wealth as the main factors to define a country’s preference for ECE goals. The reason why governments invest in ECE services is a blend between two tendencies, the child-centric ‘preparing children for primary school’ approach, and the parent-driven ‘helping parents go back to work’ stand (Cochran 2011). Moreover, ECE goals oscillate on an ‘integrated development – learning skills’ axis (Figure 2.2 below), according to each country’s historical narrative (Ibid.). *ECE patterns* provides a definition of child-centred and teacher-directed pedagogies, with a summary of the most important ‘traditional’ and ‘emerging’ ‘Western’ patterns (Kilderry 2007). The third subsection, *ECE curricula*, sheds light on the pros and cons of the two main European curriculum types, the ‘framework, consultative,’ and the ‘central, competency-oriented’ one (Bennett 2001). All three subchapters link the international debate with the Chinese one, without going into much detail regarding the latter, as the Chinese case is tackled at length in section two, *Chinese perspectives on ECE*.

Fig. 2.2 Orientations shaping European ECE policy frameworks



Source: Cochran 2011, 67

Figure 3.2 Orientations shaping European ECE policy frameworks

Parent involvement deals with the concept of *shared responsibility* (Mantovani 2007) in educating the new generations within the European context, where parents play an increasing role in their children’s kindergarten life. Similarly, in China, the parent – constructed as a consumer of preschool services (Katz 1993) – has become more demanding in terms of quality, gets more involved in school life, and pushes for a more Westernised education (Luo et al. 2013). The fifth subsection, *Teacher preparation*, is only briefly developed, as it has little bearing on my research question. I took this dimension into consideration when interviewing kindergarten staff and ECE officials, but only to add to my understanding of how ECE is defined by Shanghai’s Three-Year Action Plans (STYAPs), which regulate teacher preparation requirements. As to *Preschool-primary-school linkages*, Neuman identified a global trend for closer collaboration between kindergarten and primary school (2001). In the Chinese case I could not identify the existence of a clear national strategy ensuring continuity, with the

exception of the newly introduced moral education agenda, which sees the inclusion of values and citizenship education at every educational level (e.g. *2020 Law on the Rights of Minors*).

Section two, *Chinese Perspectives on ECE - A Cinderella story*, looks at the country's ECE policy reforms and financial system, with focus on the 2010 radical Education Reform. This subchapter analyses social, political, and economic development, interests and demands of the public, and international influences (Qi and Melhuish 2016) to provide a complex understanding of preschool education in China. It comprises of four analytical dimensions, *national goals, patterns and curricula, current situation of ECE and the financial system*. I also provide a comparison between national and local (Shanghainese) ECE legislation in *Chapter 4*, where I focus exclusively on the dominant discourse's dissemination of a patriotic ECE narrative shaped by moral education in the case of elite Shanghainese kindergartens. I not only look at the four key documents of the 2010 Reform and subsequent national legislation for ECE, but also at four rounds of STYAPs and their interpretation by the Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) and local education officials.

In the *Chinese national goals* section I use a historical approach to explain China's contemporary perceptions regarding education, with roots in Confucianism (Hayhoe 1997) and the imperial examination system (Zhao 2014), shifting towards education as 'numeric capital' (Woronov 2016), where test scores reflect an individual's social standing, and culminating with more and more urban parents calling for teaching environs that nurture the development of creative skills (Tobin et al. 2009), resisting the Centre's homogenising discourse. Moreover, I explain the origin and importance of the core socialist values in the national strategy of creating citizens "of and for the PRC" (Gow 2017). The merged dimensions *ECE patterns and curricula* form their own section and are analysed using Huo's four-stage historical approach (2015). Filtering their relevance for the current debate, I only expand on the last two phases, the period of imitation of Western patterns (1978-2009), and the ECE reform under a national innovation strategy (2009-present). I focused on the *Current situation of preschool education*, which I define as a plurality of the competing forces of globalisation and nationalisation, with the need for a hybrid pattern that merges Chinese traditions with universal regulations regarding educational innovation (Chen and Liu 1996). The final section tackles the *Evolution and innovation of China's ECE financial system*, highlighting the five main aspects of financial policy reform since 1978 (Cai and Feng 2015). As a result of decentralisation and a community-based approach towards financing, I show how Chinese kindergartens are evolving into privileged spaces where the socialist rhetoric is constantly re-negotiating with global capitalist forces.

2.2 International perspectives on ECE

I am using Cochran's analytical framework to evaluate international and Chinese views on ECE because of its clarity in providing an interconnected perspective on global ECE dynamics, selecting (1) national goals, (2) ECE patterns, (3) curricula, (4) parental involvement, (5) teacher preparation, and (6) preschool-primary school linkages as the policy domains pertinent to my analysis (Figure 2.1 above shows the connections between these categories in nested relations).

My choice of theoretical framework was driven by my research question, as only by first understanding the development of global ECE trends will I be able to understand the Chinese case, as they are inextricably linked. China has been an imitator of Western ECE policies and patterns since the Reform and Opening up, but it is now trying to find its own way (Huo 2015; Vickers and Zeng 2017; Vickers 2021). By breaking down the analysis into six categories I look at the dissemination of values and citizenship education from different

perspectives, as well as compare different aspects of ECE. Cochran (2011) succeeded at integrating historical patterns, current policy goals and mediating influences to understand ECE policy and programme dimensions, a strategy that I also apply for China. However, I add a cultural dimension to the analysis of national goals, as I am interested in the dissemination of moral education (especially the core socialist values) by a Beijing-driven national ECE agenda.

I provide a structured summary of the literature review in Table 2.1 [below](#), which illustrates the comparative approach to this analysis. Hence, I introduce the international ECE policy domains with their respective dimensions and connect them with the Chinese case, by introducing the China-related questions I aim at answering in the *Chinese perspectives on ECE* sections.

2.2.1 National goals

From a national goals point of view, the two main reasons why countries invest in ECE are to better prepare children for compulsory education and to facilitate their parents' return to the labour market (Cochran 2011). The first is child-focused (see goals 1 to 4 in Table 2.2 [below](#)), as the emphasis is on making sure young children acquire certain skills and attitudes they will need in primary school, while the second is parent-driven, in the form of employment-related childcare (goals 5 and 6, Table 2.2 [below](#)).

Even though all countries have a mixture of the same ECE goals, their policies and programmes can be very different, a result of their particular historical narratives, as shaped by distinctive factors like rapid political change and poverty (Cochran 2011: 66).^{vi} Hence, they are a reflection of their respective country's societal needs, a response to the particular cultural, historical, and social influences shaping their environments (Triandis 1994; Tudge 2008). Some of the most important factors are the nature of the economic system, cultural beliefs and values, socio-political ideologies, and national wealth.

When it comes to economic systems, the binary opposite welfare-state and free market capitalism has given birth to two very distinct approaches in terms of ECE supply (Vlasov and Hujala 2016). To expand, profit-driven enterprises are ingrained in the American psyche, hence private preschools owned by large corporate chains are socially acceptable in the US (Ibid.). On the other hand, Scandinavian mentality is critical of profit-making in sectors that deal with caring for people, so preschool is defined as a public good, a universal right that anyone can access free of charge.^{vii} The U.S. has no coherent national ECE policy, as the primary responsibility for education does not fall with the federal government, but with each of the 50 states. Similar to the situation in China, where education was no exception to decentralisation in the reform era, the federal government is the one formulating ECE policies and goals, with localities being in charge of the latter's actual organisation and implementation, according to particular needs and preferences (Kamerma and Gatenio-Gabel 2007; Barnett 2010).

At the macro level, ECE is a traditional blend of taking care of young children while their parents are at work while instilling the skills, abilities and values that would help them be successful in primary school. However, in terms of educational targets, the emphasis changes across countries along an 'integrated development - school-related learning curriculum' axis (Figure 2.2), reflecting distinct cultural beliefs and ideologies. Countries like Sweden prioritise overall development, while in France's *école maternelle* subject teaching, with its focus on school readiness, is more important^{viii} (Bennett 2001; Cochran 1993). According to Neuman (2001), there are two types of OECD countries when it comes to their approach to ECE. Countries like France and Belgium, for example, promote universal, education based ECE as a way of introducing learning skills and familiarising all children with early schooling, while Italy and the Scandinavian countries perceive childhood "*as a phase of life with intrinsic value*" (p. 188).

ECE programmes are influenced by their respective cultural backgrounds, as they affect and are in turn affected by what different societies consider to be ‘good’ or ‘quality’ education, as highlighted by Tobin et al. in comparative ethnographic studies of Japanese, French, and American ECE (2005), as well as of Chinese, Japanese, and American preschools (1989; 2009). His argument is that quality standards should reflect local values and needs, as using a universal framework based on a ‘Western’ model would ignore diversity in favour of homogeneity (2005). As a cultural relativist, Tobin engages core American values regarding ECE critically and, by comparing them with successful French, Chinese, and Japanese patterns, demonstrates that their ‘universal quality’ is taken for granted and cannot be applied universally. Moreover, his anthropological approach to understanding the changes and continuities of Dagan Kindergarten in Kunming, Yunnan Province, between 1985 and 2002, with its plethora of observations (e.g. ‘A Day at Dagan Kindergarten,’ 2009: 25-30) and interviews, was fundamental for planning my fieldwork.

Another dimension of ECE national goals considers the age of the ECE services, the two options being a continuous approach, from birth to primary school, or a care (0-3 years) and education (3-6 years) dichotomy,^{ix} the latter being also favoured in China. Another similarity with the Chinese situation is that in most European countries ECE is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

My ethnographic work at five elite kindergartens in Shanghai during the academic year 2016-2017, as well as interviews with their senior class staff (for children aged 5-6), showed that public kindergartens in Shanghai follow a more ‘integrated-development’ route, as their SEB-approved curriculum and alignment with the requirements of the STYAPs prohibit them from teaching primary-school level subjects, prioritising play and games, as well as two hours of PE daily. However, in the two private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens I observed, each using a Western curriculum tweaked to suit local needs, the focus was on school-related learning, with senior class children getting lessons in English and Mandarin reading and writing, as well as Maths. Thus, private preschools catering to the Shanghainese middle class respond to market demands and offer immersive ‘Western’ education, as well as extra lessons where subjects like Mandarin and Maths are taught using primary-school patterns, to cater to the demands of the parents.

2.2.2 ECE patterns

The word ‘pedagogy’ derives from the Greek words ‘pais,’ meaning ‘child,’ and ‘agogus,’ meaning ‘leader’ (Watkins and Mortimore 1999), so ECE pedagogies deal with ‘leading young children.’ While pedagogy is the established term, I prefer to use the word pattern in reference to ECE, as pedagogy might evoke the feeling of formal education or an emphasis on the school-readiness approach, implicitly excluding any natural development approaches to ECE (Cochran 2011). The discourses on ECE patterns cover a complex, diverse and contested space, but at their core is the wish to nurture young children and treat them as valued individuals (Murray 2015). ECE patterns have emerged from Western philosophies, whose values and principles have been endorsed by recent psychological and neuroscientific findings (Murray 2015). Definitions of patterns range from giving all the power to the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge to balancing the power dynamics between teachers and pupils. For the first instance, Alexander defines pedagogy as the “*performance of teaching, together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it*” (2000: 540), while the latter perspective reflects a “*shared frame of reference [...] between the practitioner, the young child and his/her family*” (Moyles et al. 2002: 5).

Classified in terms of the purpose they serve, there are three types of ECE patterns, namely education for preparing children for school, childcare that allows parents to work, and

integrated care and education (Kaga et al. 2015). While contemporary patterns are generated by a combination of theory, research, and policymaking (Conkbayir and Pascal 2014) they were traditionally moulded by principles and values (Murray 2015). Hence, the origin of early childhood pedagogies lies with the beliefs of three Western philosophers, namely Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Fröbel, who viewed child development as a holistic process where the child learns through experience and activity (Murray 2015). However, they disagreed on the role of adults in children's learning. By using the positioning of adults and children in relation to pedagogic engagements, there are three major ECE patterns to be observed (Sylva et al. 2010), as illustrated in Table 2.3 below.

I use Kilderry's 2007 Australia-centred study to distinguish between 'traditional' and 'emerging' ECE patterns to provide an overview of the most important ECE trends internationally, as well as to understand the situation in China and its previous impetus to imitate what it perceived to be successful 'Western' pedagogies. As defined by Huo (2015), it is important to note that Chinese ECE experienced four overarching stages of ECE development: (1) learning from Japan to total Americanisation (1903-1949); (2) learning from the Soviet Union, with a focus on direct instruction and collectivist education (1949-1978), (3) learning from Europe and America and using theme-based activities and child-centred approaches (1978-2009), with an emphasis on quality education (*suzhi jiaoyu*) since the 1990s (Vickers 2021); and (4) the nationalisation of ECE via an increased dissemination of State-centred patriotism (what I label as values and citizenship education) (2009/2012- present). The Soviet instruction model predates Kilderry's operational organisation, but this does not affect the present research, as I purposefully oversimplify the Chinese by only engaging with the two most recent phases.

The *traditional* category comprises of child-centred and play-based approaches to ECE, relying on child development theories, where the focus is on each child's individual development trajectory. The common denominator of patterns like Montessori, Steiner, or Gardner's multiple intelligences is tailor-cut educational planning to suit each child's needs. While similar, play-driven patterns like the Piaget and Fröbel methods are defined by the belief that children learn naturally through different forms of play.

Emerging patterns encompass those that are sociocultural, inquiry-driven, postmodern, and critical. They critique the use of traditional ECE patterns, arguing they are grounded in hierarchical theories of growth that implicitly overlook childhood agency (Silin 1995). A sociocultural pattern, like Vygotsky's cultural historical theory, is based on the notion of the interdependence between individual and social processes in the construction of knowledge. It relies on ECE professionals who act like 'cultural guides,' helping children acquire the cultural tools needed both to assimilate into the surrounding cultural milieu and to stimulate higher mental functions (John-Steiner and Mahn 1996). The most well-known inquiry-driven pedagogy is the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which focuses on the child as an agent, an inquisitive being who learns and grows in the relationships with others (Reggio Emilia official website) (Malaguzzi 1998). Postmodern perspectives on ECE revolve around the concept of multiple identities and define educators as negotiators between different roles and responsibilities in order to instil in their charges the agency for critique (Sumsion 2005). Using this framework, knowledge is perceived as partial and context-specific (Usher and Edwards, 1994), hence children should be given as many perspectives as possible. The underlying assumption is that all applied knowledge exercises power relationships, hence even knowledge of culture, gender, and class can limit some children's learning^x (Ryan and Grieshaber 2005). Critical pedagogy looks at knowledge as a tool to understand who controls the information, as well as to define what is fair and unfair (Husband and Dixon 2007). Using this approach of closely interrogating knowledge, the ECE professional aims at creating a balanced, unprejudiced environment by constantly questioning the available curriculum (Kilderry 2007).

During my fieldwork at five public and private kindergartens in Shanghai I mainly observed the traditional pattern being used, with the children allowed to play most of the day, the exception being the formal lessons. In all three grade one public kindergartens, senior class children were taught one 30-minute-long lesson daily, which was teacher-driven and where the children were expected to sit down quietly and raise their hand to answer the teacher's questions, a legacy of the Soviet model. In the two elite private preschools the children had a lot less playtime, as they were involved in extracurricular lessons for English, Maths and Mandarin, which were also teacher-driven and usually required them to sit at a table and do page after page of exercises from subject-related workbooks, which the teachers then marked using red ink. However, there were also opportunities for five- to six-year-old children to critically engage with certain concepts or situations, when the teachers used the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) approach, or Private2's unique Philosophy for Children pattern.

When choosing the kindergartens, I made sure to select elite politics - like demonstration kindergartens and private bilingual ones using Western curricula, hoping to find the emergent patterns they advertised on their social media, but I failed to see them being applied in practice. Thus, Public1, one of the leading demonstration kindergartens in Shanghai and a spearhead for ECE research, used free play and teacher-driven lessons as their teaching pattern, with a focus on promoting Chinese culture in a traditional manner, approach mirrored by Public2 and Public3. Thus, Chinese ECE continues to favour traditional patterns, while shifts since the late 1980s aim at mixing them with Chinese elements, like the experimental work of Chen Heqin (Huo 2015). This desiderate of forging a unique Chinese pattern reflects the emergent socio-political ideology which defines ECE as "*a political issue related to the construction of a harmonious society and issues of livelihood, values, and choice*" (Huo 2015: 20), but I did not see it as a clearly defined pattern in any of the kindergartens I observed.

In Private1 kindergarten, even though it prided itself with using a unique 'philosophy for children' approach, I discovered its inquiry-driven pedagogy was unimplementable in its bilingual English-Mandarin setting, as five-year-old Chinese children did not have the English skills to understand the complex explanations of their foreign teacher or critically engage with the introduced materials (be it a book, picture, or short video) in English. In the case of Private2, its accredited International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme, another inquiry-based curriculum, also had to be massively simplified in practice, for the same reason – the language barrier: designed to be implemented in English to native speakers and in a Western cultural setting, it fell short of reaching its aims in the Chinese spatiality I was observing. Thus, though emerging patterns are being used in leading private, bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens at a discursive level, in reality the children's budding English skills prevent them from benefitting from them.

From a legislative point of view, the third STYAP (2015-2017) was in place while I was conducting my research, and it committed to the development of a child centred ECE pattern revolving around play and games (Guiding Ideology). Moreover, it stipulated the need to put an end to primary school-level academic tendencies to ensure the implementation of "*happy, enlightened education*" (Main Measures, Art. 7), without clarifying what those terms or standards mean (Shanghai Education Committee 2015).

2.2.3 ECE curricula

Mantovani defines curricula as the "*specific frameworks and processes of teaching and learning [and the] translation of broader theories and ideas about education [into action]*" (2007: 1116). My understanding of a curriculum is the concretisation of a certain ECE pattern into practice, in other words turning abstract ideas into effective *modi operandi*. European ECE curricula, as issued by national ministries, can be divided into two categories: a framework,

consultative type, which Bennett associates with Northern European countries, and a central, competency-driven curriculum spread across continental Europe (2001: 245).

In the case of a consultative curriculum, there is a national programme in place that decides the main goals and values of ECE, while its interpretation and implementation are left to the local level. It uses an integrated approach ECE pattern, meaning that the focus is on promoting the natural development of the child, not school-related learning.

The second category of curricula is central, competency-based, with clear and detailed directives issued by the ministry responsible (Bennett 2001). Consequently, the national curriculum revolves around basic competencies that every child should master at a specific point in what is defined as ‘normal development,’ with cohesive teacher training and periodic inspections of kindergartens by local ECE authorities. A comparative view in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches is detailed in Table 2.4 [below](#).

Based on my analysis of both national and local ECE legislation, as well as interviews with educators and ethnographic work in five Shanghainese kindergartens, I could not assign the Chinese case to a clear-cut category, but a hybrid one, as I noted elements from both typologies. As follows, aligned with a Centre-led, competency-oriented narrative I found that national and local ECE legislation clearly defines activity domains, each with a set of competencies that children must reach in their age-group, with all five observed kindergartens using the *2012 Curriculum Guidelines* in their curricula development, for example. However, as education is decentralised in China the ECE aims set forth by the 2010 Education Reform were left to the interpretation, implementation, and financing of localities. This framework, consultative trait is showcased by Shanghai interpreting national legislation in its own Three-Year Action Plans and having to find the money to offer three years of quality and affordable kindergarten education to all its residents. Moreover, both the Centre and localities encourage the ordinary citizen to get involved in education, from asking the public’s opinion on new pieces of legislation in their draft form to collecting parent questionnaires annually from different kindergartens and taking into consideration their feedback in developing future legislation. I discuss the Chinese case in the subsection on Chinese ECE policies.

2.2.4 Parental involvement

In harmony with the general view that parent involvement in children’s education is central to successful child development (New and Cochran 2007), European programmes strive to ensure that parents and the community are involved not only in preschool life, but also in the transition to primary school. Moreover, there is a strong correlation between parental participation and a long history of ECE provisions (Cochran 2011: 75). In quality ECE programmes curriculum development takes into consideration parental goals and values (Kim and Fram 2009). Parental involvement is highly encouraged in countries where the approach to preschool education is based on integrated development, while it is discouraged where the national ECE strategy is focused on school readiness. In the latter case, teachers tend to resist parental influences. Notwithstanding, the concept of shared responsibility in educating the new generations has been given attention in European policy making,^{xi} cooperation which usually takes the form of parent – teacher discussions about child development. In the case of France and Italy, despite having opposing ECE national goals, both countries use the same system of compiling extensive records of a child’s evolution in preschool (Neuman 2001). Teacher observations, photographs of the child’s daily life, artwork and science projects are all amassed into portfolios throughout the academic year and used to provide insight into the child’s world view. This easily employed method helps both teachers and parents understand the child’s future needs. I found this to be the case in all five observed kindergartens, with the teachers

keeping meticulous records especially in the two private kindergartens (going so far as to send pictures and short comments about each child to the parents daily, using a private WeChat group).

Existing research suggests that parents make childcare decisions based both on what they believe is best for their child, and on more practical considerations such as cost and convenience (Peyton et al. 2001) Another selection criterion is the parents' values and priorities for their child (Fuller et al. 1996), despite their preferences not always aligning with the final selection, as availability and financial factors tend to have more weight. My analysis of the parent questionnaires^{xiii} I collected in two public and two private kindergartens, as well as interviews and observations during the academic year 2017-2018 indicate that Chinese parents behave like agents only when they have specific requirements from the formal education setting.

In China's elite private kindergartens, they feel they have the right to influence the teaching patterns and curriculum, as well as the teacher selection and even daily operations because they pay high tuition fees (Lin 2007). Parents are defined as consumers of preschool services and play a vital role in conceptualising what constitutes quality ECE, as the more kindergartens value and consider parental goals and values, the closer parent-teacher relationships become, leading to a higher quality of ECE programmes (Katz 1993). My fieldwork observations align with the majority of literature on the topic (Tobin et al. 1989 and 2009; Luo et al. 2013), namely that the affluent strata in Shanghai want their children to have an educational advantage by exposing them to an immersive 'Western' environment, especially learning English from native teachers.

To my knowledge, the most recent and relevant research aimed at comprehending what urban and suburban Chinese parents understand by 'quality' ECE programmes identifies four groups of parental views,^{xiii} with the surprising result that parents prioritised their children's physical and emotional wellbeing over the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills (Hu et al. 2016). Noteworthy is that these findings contradict those of mainstream literature on ECE in China, where Chinese parents are described as different from Western parents by preferring teacher-centred teaching to give their children a head start in terms of academic achievements (Ibid. 2016). Hence, in line with this study, urban parents lean more towards an integrated development approach than a school-related learning one.

As Chinese education is exam-driven, grades remain the golden measure of educational attainment and reflect one's social values, what Woronov calls 'numeric capital,' "*an economism that is sedimented within the bodies of the nation's youth*" (2016: 18) and predetermines one's success in life. Hence, though many parents criticise the 'narrow-mindedness' of the system, with its exclusive focus on memorisation and tests, they reinforce it by doing their best to send their children to top schools. For example, the practice of parents renting an apartment in a neighbourhood so that their children can attend a 'better' school is quite common (Hu et al. 2016). Also, compared to other countries, Chinese parents are willing to spend a significant portion of their income on extracurricular activities and tutors for their children, just to give them a competitive edge (Chao 2000). Moreover, while they allow their offspring more freedom in preschool, once the children enter compulsory education their parents work with the schools to shape a new generation of hard-working and obedient individuals (Hu et al. 2016). In line with Woronov (2016), the Chinese education system is shaped by fierce competitiveness, rendering it incredibly individualistic. Driven by the logic of commodity, middle class parents are asking for a more marketable education for their children, which they see as 'Western' education in terms of curricula and delivered by native English teachers. However, from 2012 onwards the regime has become wary of simply emulating Western curricula and patterns and is instead promoting 'Chinese' models shaped by patriotism and traditional Chinese culture. Superficially, the hierarchical ordering of the population generated by 'numeric capital' might clash with the egalitarian basis of socialism, but for the

fact that the dominant discourse is constructing Chinese citizenry in hierarchical terms, where subjects are expected to equate their interest with those of the nation, as embodied by the CCP (Vickers 2021: 55). While Woronov (2016) looked at the interplay between these new and competing new forms of capitalism and socialism within the spatiality of vocational schools, I applied a similar analytical angle to elite preschools in Shanghai.

2.2.5 Teacher preparation

Staff preparation is an indicator of ECE quality. As my research does not focus on teacher preparation, and this topic is very vast, I will only summarily include professional development requirements and programmes in Western countries. According to the 2001 OECD guidelines, across Europe preschool educators had 3-4 years of college preparation, similar in status with that of primary school teachers, with a balance between theory and practice.

For China, while the national discourse is emphasizing the importance of well-trained teachers to maintain a high standard of ECE, there are no standardised requirements for ECE caregivers and teachers at the provincial level,^{xiv} Shanghai being an exception, as ECE educators need to have a qualification in the field. The actual situation follows economic distribution patterns, where the wealthier the locality, the higher the wages, hence the better prepared the teachers. The most qualified ECE professionals are found in China's wealthiest cities, who also have higher requirements for teaching staff regulated by local policies.^{xv} In rural areas, on the other hand, ECE teachers are scarce and lack proper training (Li et al. 2007).

2.2.6 Preschool - primary school linkages

In 2001, Neuman used the *OECD Thematic Review of ECEC Policy* to analyse strategies linking ECE with primary schools, noting a societal trend that perceived the transition from preschool to compulsory education as a shared responsibility between home, community, school, and ECE programme, as well as the need for closer collaboration between kindergarten and primary school teaching patterns. One group of ECE experts argued in favour of a more child-centred approach in primary school, while also raising the concern that the spill-over effect of a closer linkage would lead to a more learning-based ECE pattern (Neuman 2001). In the opposite camp, some primary school teachers complained about the growing number of pupils who were not prepared to enter formal schooling and had difficulty adapting to a more structured instruction setting, thus asking for preschool pedagogies to become more 'school-like' (Neuman, 2001: 189). In order to strengthen the connection between preschool and primary school, Neuman proposes four general strategies, targeting structural, pedagogical, and professional continuity, as well as continuity with the home and community.^{xvi}

In the case of China, while both national and local ECE legislation mention the need for closer connections between kindergartens and primary schools, I could not find a clearly defined strategy of how this should be accomplished, even in the case of Shanghai, a frontrunner for education. However, regarding Beijing's moral education discourse, the dissemination of values and citizenship education does not only target compulsory and higher education, but also preschool, with the syntagm "cultivating patriotic citizens" becoming ubiquitous in ECE legislation. However, given the lax regulatory environment for preschool education, and with provinces free to develop their local teaching patterns and curricula (as is the case with Shanghai's customised STYAPs), it is next to impossible to truly shed light on continuities and disruptions between kindergarten and primary school curricula and teaching patterns. To date, China does not have any provisions for encouraging preschool – primary

school linkages and the Chinese public's consensus is that compulsory education should focus on school-related learning (Zhao 2014).

After looking at international ECE in terms of the six policy domains explained in the previous sections, I will continue by expanding on the first three – *national goals, patterns, and curricula* in the subchapter *Chinese Perspectives*.

2.3 Chinese perspectives on ECE: A Cinderella story

This section looks at the evolution of Chinese ECE since 1978 to the present, focusing on policy reforms and its financial system. This historical approach relies on China's particular narrative to shed light on the country's current national goals, patterns, and curricula, explaining how globalisation and localisation are shaping the national strategy for ECE since 2010. The development of Chinese ECE is the result of the confluence of three factors, namely social, political, and economic development, public interest, and international influences (Qi and Melhuish 2016). I posit that given the context of decentralisation and a community-based approach towards financing ECE, Chinese kindergartens have evolved into privileged spaces where the socialist rhetoric is constantly re-negotiating with global capitalist forces. In line with Lin (2007), my fieldwork suggests that, until the academic year 2016-2017 the Centre had allowed preschools in Shanghai, especially private and bilingual English-Mandarin ones, to develop in a fairly *laissez-faire* environment, with parents and educators having the agency to decide on curricula and teaching patterns. However, around and after the 19th National Congress of October 2017 I noticed a tightening of control over the dissemination of Western culture, with Space1 pushing for more traditional and patriotic activities to replace foreign festivals like Christmas or Halloween.

This recent shift from integrating Western popular culture elements into kindergarten curricula is a result of Xi Jinping's rhetoric in support of moral education permeating every stage of education, as well as every aspect of people's lives. This dominant discourse both coexists with and meets resistance in the views of the ordinary Chinese, who has come to value marketable skills like foreign languages and creativity (Tobin et al. 2009), acquired from Western cultural immersion programmes using foreign curricula and native English teachers.

Regarding the disseminated curricula and teaching patterns, while on the discursive level expressed by ECE legislation and political rhetoric the 2010 ECE Reform pushed for the imitation of a variety of successful traditional ECE patterns based on play and nurturing each child's aptitudes, in practice the socialist model of direct instruction is still used during formal lessons (Tobin et al. 2009; Huo 2015). However, hybrid models, which successfully merge Western patterns with Chinese characteristics are emerging (Ryan 2011) but, based on my fieldwork, only in leading polities like demonstration kindergartens and elite private ones. With more power derived from financial contributions to kindergartens, parents have been eroding the rigid traditional education system, while Beijing also allowed this situation given the country's growing need for kindergartens, especially with the implementation of the *Two-child policy*. However, Space1 has started to push for the inclusion of values and citizenship education as a core component of every kindergarten curriculum, be they public or private, with the aim of creating patriotic individuals and ensuring allegiance to the Party in the young generation (Mu 2014; Gow 2017).

2.3.1 Chinese national goals

In today's globalised world, no locality can escape the influence of external forces. As 'Western' values have a direct effect on the entirety of Chinese society, both the Centre and

individual kindergartens (especially demonstration preschools) are finding ways to respond to globalisation not by simple emulation, but by creating viable local patterns.^{xvii} According to Huo (2015), the greatest challenge for Chinese ECE is to create a theory system and practice model based on core Chinese values able to deliver the kind of education the Party needs to maintain its ideological foundation. ECE is an important political instrument for the construction of a harmonious society founded on shared moral education because of the key role it plays in the first stage of communal value iteration for children. Preschool starts the process of moulding ‘upstanding patriotic individuals’ by instilling in young children love for the motherland and, implicitly, the Communist Party.

But what is the cultural milieu where globalisation and socialism with Chinese characteristics negotiate the formation of a new ECE system? For Hayhoe (1997), Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist views of society and knowledge, as well as one’s role as a human being are useful to understand core values in Chinese education. Traditionally, Chinese society was constructed around the notion of family and emphasizes family ties.^{xviii} However, this way of seeing oneself and the world has been challenged since the birth of the PRC, first under Mao Zedong’s leadership and, after 1978, by capitalism^{xix} (Woronov 2016).

In terms of Cochran’s ‘integrated development - school-related learning curriculum’ axis (1993) (Fig. 2.2), I posit that, with the 2010 Education Reform China’s ECE strategy favours overall development over subject matter acquisition, as, at least from a legislative point of view school readiness is considered less important than holistic approaches^{xx} to teaching and learning. This preference, also explicit in all four rounds of STYAPs I analysed for this thesis (and tackled in more detailed in the next chapter), emphasises the importance of play and physical exercise over formal subject instruction, which is banned until primary school. Thus, this is a clear turning point from China’s historical experiences, as the socialist instruction pattern had shaped the country’s education since the beginnings of the PRC. The focus on skills acquisition has even deeper cultural roots, going back to the *keju* (科举) or imperial examination system, a 1400-year-old tradition built on the dominant discourse of narrowing the gap between the elite and ordinary individuals by selecting public servants through an examination that everyone could enter,^{xxi} which was also extremely successful in preventing resistance and constructing obedient bodies to perpetuate the status quo.

China’s own brand of socialism has been very successful both domestically and internationally and continues to be reshaped, at least superficially, by globalisation. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the country is experiencing a revival of its national narrative of historical grandeur in terms of political and economic power and has decided to make sure that there is a strong nationalist component in the education curriculum in both private and public institutions and at all age levels^{xxii} (Mu 2014; Sonnad 2015). The 18th National Congress introduced a new theoretical framework for defining socialism with Chinese characteristics, which emphasizes eight basic requirements, namely “*the liberation and development of social productive forces, the promotion of the reform and opening up, the maintenance of social fairness and justice, common prosperity, social harmony, peaceful development, and adherence to the Party leadership*” (Chen et al. 2012). To promote socialism as a key component of political reform the expression ‘24-word core socialist values’ was coined, which the dominant discourse bases on Mao Zedong’s ideology of harmonising the interests of the state with those of the collective (Table 2.5 below). They address the whole sphere of human existence, comprising of a hierarchical set of moral principles for the nation, society and the individual and with the objective of creating “*citizens of and for the PRC*” (Gow 2017).

According to Xin Ming, a professor at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee, the 12 core socialist values play a critical role in boosting China’s soft power (Zhang and Yao 2013), evolving into a national campaign aimed at rebuilding faith amid concerns that China has lost its moral compass during its three-decade economic miracle (Mu 2014). The

Communist Party stated promoting these core values as part of “*pooling positive energy to realise the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation*” (Zhang and Yao 2013).

To use a whimsical Western analogy, the Ministry of Education has, until 2010, neglected ECE as the Cinderella of educational reform in favour of its two elder sisters, compulsory primary and secondary education (Huo 2015). The Centre’s approach to preschool education since the early ’80s has been to ‘socialise’ this education sector by facilitating the privatisation of as many public kindergartens as possible (many of them having belonged to SOEs) and by promulgating a lax legislative framework that encourages entrepreneurs to invest and make a profit (Lin 2007). For the following three decades the official rhetoric regarding Chinese ECE revolved around imitating Western patterns, while, in reality, preschool education continued to be preponderantly shaped by the Soviet-based pedagogy inherited from the Mao era, thus driven by teacher-driven instruction (Huo 2015).

This situation progressively changed until it reached the pinnacle of Reform in 2010, the ‘coming of spring for ECE in China’, when, for the first time, ECE was defined as a key component of education and social welfare, indispensable for shaping an individual’s well-being (Liu and Pan 2013: 141). However, as China’s education is decentralized, the responsibility for the interpretation and implementation of the high goals set for 2020 falls on local governments (Liu and Pan 2013; Qi and Melhuish 2016). My interviews with three education officials, one from the Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) and two from the Minhang Education Bureau (MEB) provide new insight into the state of ECE in Shanghai, with focus on the dissemination of values and citizenship education (see Chapter 4).

2.3.2 The Chinese ECE pattern and curriculum development

Since its very beginning in the early 1900s, Chinese ECE has been shaped by foreign theories and practices and is still struggling to find its own style with solid Chinese characteristics.^{xxiii} Because of its imitation-driven strategy in terms of pattern development since the early 1980s, it easily absorbed Western values seeped in liberal ideology (Huo 2015), to the detriment of Chinese traditions, a trend that has been changing since 2010, as the national rhetoric of the last decade has been focused on creating a strong socialist educational system that can be competitive internationally. To further this target, the November 2016 *Law on Private Education* stipulates that a core Chinese curriculum must be included in all educational institutions, at all levels, so as to ensure the progressive, uninterrupted construction of socialist citizens (Chen 2016).

In order to come closer to understanding the Centre’s vision for the future of ECE as a consequence of this legislative U-turn advocating for moral education even in private schools using Western curricula, I will use Huo’s (2015) four-phase approach to analyse the ideological undercurrents of Chinese ECE (Table 2.6 below), his framework being the most comprehensive I have come across.^{xxiv} While the table provides a general overview of the four stages and their main developments, my analysis will only expand on the last two, with the current phase also being the focus of Chapter 4, given that they have the most relevance for understanding the current situation of ECE in China. Table 2.7 below chronologically lists all the major ECE legislation, also mentioning their importance for the reform process.

2.3.2.1 The 3rd stage of Chinese ECE (1978-2009) - Learning from Europe and America: Theme-based activities instruction and child-centred education

With China’s opening-up in 1978, its ECE programme and goals were submitted to the influence of global trends (Vickers and Zeng 2017). Wanting to become competitive internationally, the country looked at education as a key driving force, starting a series of

profound education reforms to support its economic development (Qi and Melhuish 2016). During this period of increasing innovation relative to the previous collectivist model of education, the MOE published a series of guidance outlines or work regulations, as detailed in Table 2.8 below.

The analysis of the succession of ECE reforms in the post-Mao era shows that Chinese policymakers used Western patterns as their model, but the foundation they were building on was a largely Soviet-inspired system. Hence, the guidelines established (1) the transition from a subject-based curriculum to one shaped by variety; (2) a more child-centric pedagogy; (3) the replacement of static, direct instruction activities with learning through games and play; (4) the shift from classroom-based activities to more diverse ones; and (5) curriculum evaluation targets that were more process-driven, rather than result-focused (Shi 2003, in Huo 2015: 11).

The 1981 *Guidelines for Kindergarten Education* emphasized the role of ‘play’ in education, instructing teachers to integrate play with group activities and physical activities in order to fulfil educational goals. Coupled with the *One-child policy* introduced around the same time, the document also stressed the need for cooperation between preschool and parents (Qi and Melhuish 2016). Hence, in the 1980s and 1990s, the official Chinese ECE pattern was mainly shaped by Piaget’s child development theory, with the Reggio Emilia Approach becoming influential later on (Wang 2004). The *2001 Guidelines for Kindergarten Education* further accentuated the synergetic relationship between teachers, parents and communities, with children’s individual differences and unique experiences to be celebrated in a formal learning environment.^{xxv} However, their implementation was difficult because of the established tradition of teacher-centred pedagogy (Liu and Feng 2005). Tobin et al. (2009), in their chapter on Chinese ECE, highlight that “*the success of the reform depends on teachers’ understanding of how and why to teach children in the ways the Guidelines suggest*”^{xxvi} (Hua, in: Tobin et al. 2009: 86).

While the second stage of policy reform was anchored in a Soviet instruction model,^{xxvii} during this phase ECE policy makers and educators were keen on better understanding European and American liberalist education patterns, where the teacher takes a passive role as observer and guide (Huo 2015). Ryan (2011) provides an in-depth analysis of the *2001 Guidelines*, noticing radical changes mixed with the continuity of traditional ideas and values regarding education. In her introduction to *Education and Reform in China* (2011) she highlights how the official rhetoric on curriculum reform emphasised the importance of shifting the teaching and learning focus from the basic acquisition of skills and knowledge to “*the capacity of students to engage in critical thinking, problem solving and creativity,*” a target that has still not been met across China.^{xxviii} Gu and Li (2007) describe this period as having two competing educational forms, namely socialist education and capitalist education. By rushing to overcome the conditioning of the Mao era, when education was solely shaped by the Soviet collectivist model, Chinese ECE turned towards Western liberal methodologies without fully understanding them,^{xxix} which led to considerable discrepancies between progressive ideas and daily practices (Huo 2015). Moreover, even with all the positive policy changes of this period, the number of public preschools was significantly reduced because of privatisation, while private kindergartens became a booming phenomenon (Zhou 2011). The shortage of affordable childcare services led to public outcry and was extensively covered by the media, the outcome being for the Centre to push for more private investment and societal involvement (Qi and Melhuish 2016), as well as decentralise ECE and have local governments find the necessary funds to build welfare based ECE.

2.3.2.2 The 4th stage (2009 – present) - The adjustment of ECE Reform under a National Innovation Strategy

January 9th 2006 marks the moment when China moved from being passive to actively tackling globalisation, as, during the National Conference on Science and Technology, Chairman Hu Jintao named innovation as the basis for economic development for the next 15 years. In line with the ‘rise of China’ rhetoric (Herrick et al 2016), the country’s aim became to bring a vital contribution to the world scene, “*more spiritual value and wealth for mankind*” (Huo 2015: 28). This emphasis on a national innovation strategy had a spill-over effect on the ECE sector (Table 2.9 below).

With the four key documents of the 2010 Education Reform (Table 1.1 below), a new national plan of education reform took shape, which set very high goals for the following decade.^{xxx} For the first time in Chinese ECE history preschool education was defined as a key component to ensuring the physical and mental growth of children, as well as to fostering their intellectual development (Qi and Melhuish 2016). While ECE officially became part of social welfare, the abstract policy guidelines, steeped in ideological undertones, remained disconnected from reality (Liu and Pan 2013). As the Centre left their interpretation and implementation to provincial, regional, and local levels, it put enormous pressure on localities, which, except for tier one cities like Shanghai lack the necessary resources to reach the 2020 goals. More explicitly, the public revenue tax system cannot cope with the universalisation of one year of preschool. Following the 2010 Reform, provincial governments issued three-year action plans, with each county in each province being required to develop their own version, tailored to local needs. The four consecutive STYAPs are key policy resources I am using to understand the current situation of kindergartens in the municipality and are closely analysed in Chapter 4.

After the austerity of the Cultural Revolution, the opening-up after 1978 brought with it the idealisation of the West, especially of American culture. Many ordinary Chinese started to believe that ‘all that is Western is gold,’ taking the path of unquestioned acceptance towards foreign values and practices (Lin 2007). This was also the case with Chinese educators, who imitated ‘Western’ ECE patterns without fully understanding them (Huo 2015). Hence, globalisation led Chinese ECE to a catch-22 situation, shaped by a perpetual iteration of a cycle of trying out new Western methods, superficially applying them, then discarding them to pick them up again at a later date (Huo 2015). Tobin et al. (2009) stress that systems of ECE reflect and pass on cultural values, while at the same changing according to cultural expectations of what children should learn.

To reach China’s goal of developing a workforce that has skillsets sought after internationally, mechanical imitation of liberal teaching methods and curricula are proving inefficient (Zhao 2014), as they clash with Chinese educational values, both inherited from the Soviet pattern and Confucian traditions (inasmuch as they have been preserved from the Maoist era). For a Chinese ECE pattern to be successful and bring about a feasible reform, it needs to take into account local needs and societal expectations (Tobin 2005). The time is ripe for Chinese policymakers to develop a core ECE pattern that suits national conditions (be applicable and in harmony with ideological expectations), while at the same time adheres to universal regulations regarding educational innovation (Chen and Liu 1996). Such a hybrid method could ensure both the future vitality of Chinese ECE, as well as its unique contribution internationally. Huo (2015) cautions decisionmakers to surpass what he calls narrow-minded nationalism, but strongly argues in support of a nationalist sentiment and the development of a Chinese ECE pattern centred on traditional values, mirroring Xi Jinping’s rhetoric on moral education. While it is tricky to blend Western and Eastern ECE patterns, as they are the product

of different social cultures, stemming from diverging social ideologies and values in childhood education, it is not an impossible task, as it was proven by Chen Heqin's experimental schools of the '20s and '30s. Zhao (2014), on the other hand, is sceptical of what he labels 'Chinese harmony' and 'Western innovation' being able to thrive concomitantly, arguing that their intrinsic definitions are mutually exclusive, 'harmony' itself being a concept based on 'obedience' and 'conformity'.

According to Woronov (2016), a new regime of value defined by 'numeric capital' emerged with the Reform and opening-up, where young people's social value is reflected by their exam scores. With the reintroduction of the *zhongkao* (中考) (middle school entrance exam) and the *gaokao* (高考) (high-school entrance exam) to select those moving on towards higher education, the State created an environment where test results are equated with an individual's moral and personal worth.^{xxxii} Given the rigidity of the education system and the incredible pressure for children to be competitive in terms of their test scores, the legislation of the *2010 Education Reform*, which promotes integrated development, clashes with Chinese realities and the expectations of the parents, as many kindergarten children take an entrance exam to enter primary school and are expected to have strong literacy skills upon entering grade one. My research sheds light on both parental and teacher expectations regarding ECE, with the focus on the ways in which Shanghai's elite kindergartens negotiate between a core patriotic curriculum and 'emerging' Western pedagogies (Kilderry 2007), like in the case of the two private preschools I observed.

After highlighting the cornerstones of ECE policy reform since 1979 and understanding the evolution of patterns and curricula, in the next section I will look at China's financial system regarding ECE by highlighting the innovations in planning and legislation.

2.3.3 The evolution and innovation of China's ECE financial system

The Chinese ECE financial system can be divided into two periods, the first under planned economy (1949 to 1979), and the second under the Reform (1979-present) (Cai and Feng 2015). During the first phase, all sectors of society, from enterprises to public institutions, were responsible for the development of ECE and established their own nurseries and kindergartens. By 1979 there was a clear rural and urban demarcation and a diversified financial investment system for ECE, which collapsed under a socialist market economy. With the economic reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping, China's national financial system was defined by the principles of decentralisation and distribution of profits, while the funding for ECE became society based. Since the 1980s, there have been a series of improvements to the financial system, with this section expanding on the five main aspects (Cai and Feng 2015).

First, new legislation was issued to clarify the duties of governments and institutions at different levels, culminating with the *2003 Guidance on ECE Reform and Development*, the first document to clarify the division of powers of financial authority and rights at all levels. Next, the administrative and financial systems of kindergartens attached to agencies not under the control of the Department of Education were amended. Hence, the *2003 Guidelines* stipulated the transfer of preschool funding from SOEs and public institutions to local education departments, also encouraging entrepreneurs to take over the running of state-owned kindergartens.^{xxxiii} This document contributed to increasing access inequality to preschool education, as the number of public kindergartens decreased, while private kindergartens, with their unregulated tuition fees, filled the gap (Liu and Pan 2013).

The 1997 document *Opinion on the Implementation of ECE Development in the Ninth Five-Year Plan* dealt with how social power should be mobilised to establish kindergartens, with the local government providing centralised leadership to entrepreneurs who were interested in running a kindergarten. Moreover, it was also highly supportive of the

establishment of private kindergartens. This directive for local governments to set up kindergartens while encouraging the involvement of other actors, especially local communities, was continued in the *2003 Guidelines*. They specified that preschools supported by social factors should have equal status with public kindergartens when it comes to the registration process, classification and ranking, teacher training, professional title evaluation, and awards. Hence, in terms of laws and regulations, public and socially funded (private) kindergartens were placed on equal footing.

The third aspect concerns the active promotion of community-based preschool education, a policy decision aimed at legitimising the decentralisation of education. For this process to be a success, there was a need for an ECE system reflective of local needs and particularities. Only such a milieu could have nurtured the continued support and involvement of non-state actors such as neighbourhood communities and private individuals in opening and running preschools. The underlying assumption driving the socialisation of kindergartens was that the more anchored they became in their respective communities, the more the responsibility towards their operation shifted from the state (and SOEs) towards society^{xxxiii} (Cai and Feng 2015).

Another dimension focuses on the gradual standardisation of kindergarten fees and the building of joined financing, meaning that teaching costs are shared between various agencies. China does not maintain records on nationwide kindergarten fees and there are numerous fee programmes operating at the same time. By using official SEB documents, as well as by looking at kindergarten websites, it is evident that tuition fees depend on the geographic positioning of the preschool, as well as its amenities, curriculum, teaching staff and association with other (famous) institutions. Bilingual English-Mandarin and international kindergartens using a foreign, usually Western curriculum, as well as having a predominantly foreign teaching staff could charge as much as 200,000 RMB per annum in 2016 in Shanghai.

The fifth and last aspect shows the implementation of flexible and gradually increasing financial investment policies, as well as tolerance toward moderate differences and imbalances. As previously mentioned, the reformed ECE system is affected by severe financial disparities between rural and urban areas, as well as between public and private kindergartens and within the public kindergarten pyramidal system itself. Public kindergartens are the responsibility of their local government and agencies, and the amount of funding they can access is directly related to their locality. Even with the strategy to popularize community-based investment in kindergartens, the clear winners of the reform are those kindergartens attached to departments of education, those sponsored by institutions, as well as demonstration kindergartens, in other words public institutions that cater to China's elite and where the State has a strong presence. On the other hand, preschools funded by various organization and individuals have been largely ignored by this pragmatic approach to government funding.

In a nutshell, the evolution of China's ECE is at the confluence of three concomitant frameworks, its financial system, the education system and the social welfare system (Cai and Feng 2015). These three systems have their own sociohistorical backgrounds to negotiate, as well as the demands of a socialist market economy. Because of the complexity of this framework, China's ECE financial system is still plagued by unfairness and inefficiency, despite the effusive policy targets of policy regulations, like accessible quality education for all.

China's opening up has brought an intensification of social stratification, openness, and diversification in cultural life. The tensions within education arise from a continuous imitation of Western teaching methods instead of developing a viable Chinese pattern, increased inequality for accessing high quality education, and a disconnect between policy recommendations and their implementation (Liu and Pan 2013).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview

An individual's development is influenced by a combination of genetic endowment and her surrounding milieu, with nature and nurture sharing the role of determining one's characteristics and behaviour. This thesis looks at the dissemination of values and citizenship education both at policy-level and in practice, the latter through observation and interviews carried out at five elite Shanghainese kindergartens during the academic year 2017-2018. The analysis uses purposive (expert) sampling to engage various actors, from Space1 – the Centre, exerting power through its homogenising national discourse on ECE and acting locally through the Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) and local education bureaus, to kindergarten management, teaching staff, parents, and children (Space2 for public kindergartens and Space3 for private ones). As the scope of this investigation is to get a clear understanding of the forces shaping moral education in ECE in China, with a focus on the case study of privileged kindergartens in Shanghai, I made the decision to operate with a variety of actors and their respective narratives, only marginally focusing on children's agency.

Children's agency is captured through direct observation of selected kindergarten events, where I witnessed their behaviour during Chinese and Western festivals and is included through vignettes and short comments. The child is not only the subject of external forces, but also has the capacity for agency. Bandura (1978) was the first to propose a reciprocal determinism model, which looks at how children and their respective environments continuously influence one another. The term 'learning environment' refers to the multiple contexts in which a child spends time, like the home, preschool, and religious and community environments (Boehm and Weinberg 1997: 10). In order to understand the behaviour of the senior class children (five to six-year-olds) the thesis is based on, I took into account the demands and characteristics of their respective home and kindergarten, their embedded society. Only by grasping the different settings in which children spend their time was I able to determine what role ECE plays in constructing patriotic individuals (Figure 3.1 below). I align with Durkheim (1961) who defines education as a socialisation process, as it creates political subjects, so citizens, by its transmission of morality, norms, and world views (Barnes 1977).

To examine this interplay of factors and reach a more panoramic view of my research landscape (Table 3.1 below), I employed a mixed methods approach (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Shorten and Smith 2017). Thus, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data via parent questionnaires, which I analysed concurrently to gain insight into parents' decision-making experiences and motivations in their choice of kindergarten, as well as relationship with the dominant discourse and Western festivals. The qualitative dimension is much more developed, as I used a multitude of methods to explore the power relations between the Centre and the spaces on the periphery of the public and private kindergartens and shed light on the intricate layers of my multifaceted research question. I proceeded to directly observe children while at kindergarten, conduct semi-structured interviews with their teachers and principals, as well as analysed kindergarten curricula and social media posts. I also talked with ECE officials and experts and compared their answers with a thematic analysis of national and local ECE legislation, particularly stipulations aimed at the dissemination of moral education.

Given time and resource constraints I am not looking at the larger community the children come from. Moreover, while the religious dimension is very important in assessing learning environments through the world, China is an atheist country, so I ignored this element in my analysis. However, my hypothesis is that the gap usually filled by religion in other countries is, in China, occupied by Party ideology. Hence, socialism, with the focus on

patriotism, is the de facto state religion, as the national discourse on the core socialist values is emphasising (Zhang and Yao 2013; Mu 2014). My focus is on highlighting the role citizenship and values education plays in creating young children's world views, in cultivating patriotic citizens, as well as how adult actors – education officials, kindergarten staff and parents – internalise, resist and disseminate the Centre's rhetoric. Moreover, I am interested in seeing how Xi Jinping's nationalist revival narrative interacts with Western values, as expressed in the popular culture contained in Western holidays like Halloween and Christmas.

The sample size is five kindergartens, three public polities from central districts, and two private ones located in Minhang District, an inner suburban area (Figure 3.2 below). I directly observed a senior class (also called K2 or *daban* 大班) of about 25-30 children aged five-to-six in each preschool throughout the academic year 2017-2018, as they celebrated events related to Halloween, Christmas and the Spring Festival. In my selection of kindergartens I used purposive sampling (Patton 2002; Palinkas et al. 2015), choosing elite preschools based of my previous knowledge as a kindergarten teacher in Shanghai and accessibility (Table 3.2 below). According to the SEB's official classification, all three public kindergartens are ranked the highest, as level one grade one institutions (*yiji yilei* 一级一类), while the two private polities belong to elite education groups.

For gathering primary data from education officials and ECE academics and experts I conducted semi-structured interviews by using snowball sampling. I started by interviewing the contacts I already had at the SEB and local media and used their referrals to build a chain of additional interview subjects. Without their *guanxi* I could not have gained access to any of these stakeholders, as both doing research on ECE (hence observing young children) and focusing on a political issue (moral education) around the 19th National Congress of October 2017 created a highly sensitive context for a Western researcher. By using exponential discriminative snowball sampling I only pursued the referrals for new subjects who were relevant for the aim and objectives of my study.

3.2 Sampling methods

3.2.1 Purposive sampling for kindergartens

In order to look at the interaction between globalisation and localisation in ECE I decided to focus on famous public and private kindergartens, on the premise that they were leaders in terms of curricula and teaching patterns and privileged spaces of observation where Chinese culture and international influences were in a perpetual flux. Moreover, I was keen on comparing preschools which used bilingual English-Mandarin curricula and had foreign English teachers. Using my expert knowledge on Shanghainese kindergartens (acquired while working at various public and private kindergartens and at different English training centres), information from my teacher friends, the official kindergarten ranking,^{xxxiv} as well as from China Education Online CERNET^{xxxv} (www.eol.cn), I shortlisted five leading public kindergartens and five elite private ones (the criteria are listed in Table 3.2 below).

After this non-random selection of a representative sample for quality ECE in Shanghai, the greatest challenge I was faced with was getting past the gatekeepers, namely the principals, which would not have been possible without the help of a good friend, Carol, a pseudonym to protect her identity, who used her considerable *guanxi* to open doors for me at five of them. Thus, I was able to observe three level one grade one public centres, with Public1 being one of the best demonstration kindergartens in Shanghai. Out of the five private kindergartens I had shortlisted only two granted me access, the other three turning me down by saying they and their parents would not feel comfortable with having an unknown person in close proximity to their students. Private1 and Private2 kindergartens both use international curricula and have a

bilingual and a local (Chinese) stream, while Public1 has both an international and local programme and Public2 and Public3 only have a local stream.

As I wanted to gain insight into how society influences ECE and the role of parents in negotiating with the Centre's homogenising power in terms of kindergarten curricula, I employed purposive, homogenous sampling to select the top preschools from downtown Shanghai and Minhang District. By conducting direct observation in some of the best public and private kindergartens I could assess Shanghai's socioeconomic elite in terms of their values and citizenship education expectations, as well as their internalisation – through imitation and resistance, of the Centre's demand for a core curriculum shaped my moral education. I decided to use homogenous sampling because I wanted to focus on one particular subgroup,^{xxxvi} in which all the sample members are similar (Saunders et al. 2012).

I observed one K2 class from each kindergarten, as children between the ages of five and six have more capacity for agency. In the three public preschools I focused on a class from the local stream, while in the two private kindergartens I chose a class from the bilingual English-Mandarin programme. I visited the same children throughout the 2017-2018 academic year, during celebrations related to three events, Halloween, Christmas, and the Spring Festival. While the thesis also includes an analysis of China's National Day celebrations, I did not observe these activities because I had not received by ethical approval in time. I chose China's National Day and the Spring Festival as frameworks to understand the dissemination of socialist and traditional Chinese values, and Halloween^{xxxvii} and Christmas as festivals representative for 'Western' culture, given their global popularity among children. The key observation points for each event are detailed in Table 3.3 below. The children were observed as a group, but I took notes on individual behaviour during 'Circle Time' and their formal daily lesson, as well as free playtime, especially for anecdotal purposes.

In China, Western scholars have limited choice when conducting education-related research, especially when young children are involved, as without *guanxi* no doors would be opened. Moreover, the time of my fieldwork was particularly sensitive, as I was inquiring about the dissemination of moral education and increased Centre-driven control over what the regime perceives as 'Western' festivals around the 19th National Congress. To get access to the observed kindergartens I relied on a close friend, media expert Carol (ME5), who personally introduced me to the principals and vouched for my integrity as a researcher. Moreover, she was the one who had a massive contribution to my getting permission to give out parent questionnaires in Public1 and Public3 kindergartens. To get past the gatekeepers in the two private kindergartens, whose principals were noticeably wearier to allow me access, I also had to rely on the network I had built as a kindergarten teacher in Shanghai, as many of the teachers I interviewed are good friends and were happy to help. The bilingual Mandarin-English documents I distributed to all kindergarten gatekeepers and teachers were an information sheet detailing my background and research purpose (Table 3.14 below) and a consent form, which they then circulated to the parents of the observed classes using private WeChat groups.

3.2.2 Quota sampling for parent questionnaires and interviews with kindergarten staff

I employed a quota sampling strategy to distribute my questionnaires to parents and interview kindergarten management and teaching staff, as I wanted to gather representative data from a group that was already indirectly selected via the purposive sampling of the five kindergartens. The advantages of using this data collection method are time-efficiency, low cost, and high levels of objectivity (Boehm and Weinberg 1997). As each kindergarten had between three and five senior classes (with 25-30 children/ classroom), my initial plan to collect a representative sample was to distribute questionnaires to two of them, so target between 50 and 60 families. In Public1 and Public3 the gatekeepers consented to give out two rounds of

questionnaires in two K2 classrooms (so over 50 questionnaires/ round/ kindergarten), while the principal of Public2 was extremely apprehensive about it and, while at first agreeing, eventually changed her mind. In Private1 I could only collect one round, again from two senior classes (60 questionnaires being distributed), and this was the only bilingual Mandarin-English survey I gave out, the others being in Mandarin only. In Private2 I came across the same scepticism I encountered in Public2, but I managed to overcome it by designing a new questionnaire format, with a limit of 12 multiple-choice questions, which the gatekeeper approved and distributed to ten respondents (see Table 3.4 below).

Regarding interviews with kindergarten management, I talked with all five kindergarten principals, as well as Public1's international stream coordinator and Public2's vice-principal, a total of seven gatekeepers. Moreover, I conducted interviews with all the teachers of the classes I observed throughout 2017-2018: six Chinese teachers (two from each public kindergarten), and five respondents from the private kindergartens (three Chinese and two native English speakers). I consider this to be a representative group, whose insight was vital in my understanding of local ECE realities and in providing answers to my multifaced research question.

3.2.3 Snowball sampling for interviews with officials and experts

As I was interested in how the 2010 nationwide policy goals and successive relevant ECE legislation were being interpreted and implemented in Shanghai through the third Three-Year Action Plan (STYAP, 2015-2017) I conducted six semi-structured expert interviews via snowball sampling. Altogether, I managed to talk with three local education officials, two ECE professors, and one media expert, expanding my initial sphere of contacts to develop threads of networks for people to interview. My focus was also on finding out if and how the 12 core socialist values were incorporated into the official discourse and curriculum, as well as how local authorities assessed the dissemination of these values in both public and private kindergartens. In all the expert interviews I used the core questions detailed in Table 3.5 below, to generate data for a relevant thematic analysis.

The first education official I spoke with, Ms. Huang (EO1), worked for the SEB and was recommended to me by Prof. Liu from a famous university in Shanghai (EE6). I selected her because, as a public servant she could shed light on local ECE legislation, as well as how the dominant discourse perceived the dissemination of moral education in public and private kindergartens. As the two private kindergartens chosen for observation are located in Minhang District I also felt the need to interview local officials, with education official Huang putting me in contact with her friend, Ms. Bai (EO2), who worked for the MEB in the ECE department. The third official I could gain access to was Ms. Hei (EO3), also from the MEB, who agreed to an interview based on a recommendation from my research assistant. The same snowball sampling was used in interviewing Prof Liu (EE6), an ECE academic, who was introduced to me by the principal of Public3 kindergarten, and who, in turn, put me in touch with ECE Prof. Zhang (EE7), from another good local university.

The greatest limitation of snowball sampling is that the initial people one talks with connect the researcher to individuals who share the first informants' views, and thus the collected data could be unidimensional. While aware of this, I also had to adapt to a particular cultural milieu which is wary of foreign researchers and where speaking with officials and academics can be particularly difficult if you are not introduced by a trustworthy source who can endorse you. Even if you are affiliated with a famous Western university, simply cold calling people or sending out emails will lead you nowhere in China, hence I am satisfied with the number of expert interviews I collected.

I have succeeded in securing 25 interviews (see Table 3.16 below for interviewee coding) with ECE officials and leading educators in Shanghai, so I argue that I reached theoretical sufficiency, namely when further data collection ceases to yield additional themes, but with a possibility of novel nuances within sub-themes (Dey 1999; Vasileiou et al. 2018). Even though their anonymity was ensured the experts I spoke with usually replicated the official rhetoric and supported Centre-driven policies. Only because of the help of my contacts and their *guanxi* was I also able to occasionally get some candid answers.

Taking into consideration the realities of conducting research in China and pragmatic reasons like time constraints (Dey 1999), the data generated via these interviews provides invaluable insight into the current situation of ECE in Shanghai, as well as its future development. Any limitations that might have ensued from using snowball sampling were also overcome by my mixed methods approach, as well as the plethora of data collection sources, like legislation, parent questionnaires, and ethnographic research.

3.2 Data collection

I employed a variety of methods to collect data on the state of ECE, especially the dissemination of patriotic and ‘Western’ values and put together a complex picture of power relations in the case of ECE in Shanghai. This research analyses national and local legislation (only available in Mandarin), interviews with ECE experts, officials, and kindergarten staff, parent questionnaires, direct observation of kindergarten events, as well as official kindergarten social media posts (their official WeChat accounts and websites). I used triangulation to compare national and local ECE legislation since 2006, intersected it with its implementation in the five observed kindergartens, then used different qualitative and quantitative sources (interviews, observations, questionnaires) to add more substance to my analysis. Triangulation allowed me to increase the legitimacy, reliability, and validity of my findings (Moon 2019).

3.2.1 Direct observation

When viewing a learning situation, the researcher must not underestimate the complexities of systematic observation. My aim was to observe values and citizenship education, as well as the dissemination of Western culture in public and private kindergartens by taking notes on selected activities throughout the year (Table 3.6 below). I first developed a simple strategy for observing components of the kindergarten setting, as well as child and teacher behaviour that could best answer my research goals. I opted for the direct observation method,^{xxxviii} “*a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants*” (Schensul et al. 1999: 91), as I wanted to capture ‘written photographs’ of existing situations by using the five senses (Erlandson et al. 1993). Given my ethnographic approach, I looked at both settings and individuals, with a focus on child and peer/ teacher behaviours^{xxxix} (Boehm and Weinberg 1997: 3). By ‘behaviour’ I mean “*any observable, overt action or activity that an individual exhibits in a setting*” (Boehm and Weinberg 1997: 67). I took notes on both the teachers’ verbal and non-verbal behaviour, as well as a wide range of verbal and nonverbal responses from the children. While recording Circle Time and the daily 30-minute formal lesson I also employed participation charts, to keep track of the children’s individual responses in these group discussions. Moreover, in each of the five kindergartens the gatekeepers, with the parents’ consent, gave me permission to record the group discussions, with selected transcripts available in the form of vignettes in both my results chapters and in the Appendices. In terms of procedural guidelines, I followed Cartwright and Cartwright’s (1984) proposed steps, outlined in Table 3.7 below.

Regarding my observation schedule, I used a sign or event system, as opposed to a category system (Medley and Mitzel 1963). Consequently, I listed beforehand a limited number of kinds of behaviour related to patriotic and traditional values or Western culture and throughout the observation I noted which of these behaviours actually occurred and which did not. This judgement-based approach usually takes the form of a checklist, which covers areas like self-identity, social play, cognitive development, spoken and written language, etc. (see child skills checklist, Beaty 1993). Following Beaty's (1993) example, where she listed typical classroom behaviour under each category and teachers checked each action they saw the child performing regularly, along with date and supporting evidence, I used my own *Values behaviour checklist*, a sample of which is provided in Table 3.8 below. In developing these checklists I relied on my own experience as a kindergarten teacher, as well as on chats with teachers on the morning of the event and the instructional objectives described in the respective lesson plans (Table 3.9 below). This technique allowed me to focus on events of interest and not be distracted by the exhaustive picture of what was happening in a classroom on any observation day.

As a former teacher I knew that each day in kindergarten starts with Circle Time, when the teachers and children sit in a circle and freely talk about an interesting topic or, when organising a special event, discuss the meaning of the holiday, as well as the activities that will be taking place (Table 3.10 below). During this morning discussion the children have the opportunity to share their ideas. A similar activity usually takes place after the afternoon snack (so after 3 p.m.), when the children again express themselves freely regarding their experiences of the day, both through a discussion and artistically.

My main goal was to record children's verbal communication during Circle Time, where they had an increased capacity for agency given the activity was not teacher-driven, and during the formal lesson, which was always teacher-led throughout my observations. For the series of activities prepared for three of the four events chosen for analysis (Halloween, Christmas, and the Spring Festival) I used a narrative approach and observed verbal communication between the children and between the children and their teachers. With my ethical approval still pending at the end of September 2017 I could not visit the preschools around China's National Day, so my insight is derived from analysis of kindergarten social media posts, parent questionnaires, teacher interviews, lesson plans and classroom displays (e.g. teaching board, art board).

3.2.2 Parent questionnaires

The parent questionnaires in Public1, Public3 and Private1 contain a mix of multiple-choice questions assessing the respondents' socioeconomic status, and open-end ones collecting data on the home education environment, as well as the parents' cultural and educational values and expectations.^{xi} I adapted the *dimensions framework* proposed by Boehm and Weinberg (1997), as showcased in Table 3.11 below, to develop my questionnaires, a merged sample being included in Table 3.12 below. This framework fit my research aims perfectly, helping me develop a complex questionnaire according to themes that were coded in my analysis in the results chapters.

In all the kindergartens I first showed the questionnaire to the principal, who then gave her consent and informed the parents. Next, the senior class teachers gave a hardcopy^{xli} to each pupil and asked their parents to fill it out anonymously, on a volunteer basis. The children brought the filled-out surveys to kindergarten and anonymously placed them in a specially assigned basket in the lobby, by the entrance to their classroom. About a week after the questionnaires were distributed, I visited each kindergarten to collect them (see Table 3.13 below for the step-by-step procedure). While I was adamant about ensuring the anonymity of the respondents by collecting the unsigned questionnaires in this manner, I am not certain this

practice was respected in Private2, as Principal Rosie wanted to control the output of information from the parents.

The reason why I aimed at a biannual dispersal of surveys is the temporal placement of the events I was interested in - both China's National Day and Halloween are celebrated in October, so distributing the questionnaires at the beginning of November ensured that the memory of celebrating these events was still fresh, situation which applies to Christmas and the Spring Festival as well, with the second round collected in March 2018, after the Lantern Festival. As this was not possible in Private1 and Private2, I collected the single round of surveys in March only.

I strove to ensure that my questionnaires were well-designed in terms of collecting relevant data for my research goals, used language appropriate for a kindergarten setting, and were written in proper Mandarin. My friend Carol, as well as Eaten, my research assistant,^{xlii} were invaluable in helping me correctly translate the English questionnaires into Mandarin, not just from a linguistic point of view, but also keeping cultural sensitivity in mind and making sure I avoided any red flags, especially when I formulated questions about patriotic behaviour

With the exception of a few respondents in Private1, who answered in English, the majority used Mandarin and, as the questions were open-ended, I again relied on my research assistant to help me read and translate the collected data. Eaten is a proficient English speaker and we worked together to ensure that each translation was correct and the English equivalent I operated with captured the Mandarin meaning, which was vital for my coding according to predetermined themes to be factual.

Finally, I also took into account a certain level of response bias, an unavoidable consequence of the spaces the questionnaires were distributed in and by whom, namely in the classroom and by the teachers. Even though they were anonymous and collected in a basket, unsigned, there was still pressure on the parents to fill them out and some might have felt compelled to answer them 'correctly,' as opposed to truthfully, especially sensitive questions about what they thought about their child's kindergarten or what being Chinese meant to them.

3.4 Significance of observed events in terms of a values discourse

'Play' has a key role in a child's cognitive development, as it both reflects a particular way of thinking and problem solving (Piaget 1962), as well as a means for children to stretch their abilities (Vygotsky 1978). In line with Vygotsky's theory, I will be looking at organized fun activities (play) during four celebrations to understand how certain cultural elements are disseminated by the facilitator – the teacher, and processed by the audience – the children. As play is defined as a complex means of assessing a child's socioemotional, cognitive, linguistic, as well as physical development (Boehm and Weinberg 1997), the structured and semi-structured activities organised on China's National Day and the Spring Festival will shed light on the socialist and traditional Chinese values being disseminated and internalised, while Halloween and Christmas will highlight Western cultural values.

During the direct observation of these activities I limited my analysis to assessing communication and language, ignoring socioemotional characteristics and motor development. Moreover, given time constraints, my analysis only contains semi-structured, structured, as well as free play scenarios observed on those days. Moreover, I included relevant instructional activities that took place (during Circle Time and the formal lesson), including the teacher(s) presenting information to children, asking question, giving feedback, and structuring activities and assignments (Good and Brophy 1991). As I could not be present to observe China's National Day, my analysis relies on data collected from the kindergartens' social media posts, parent questionnaires, lesson plans and interviews with kindergarten management and staff.

3.5 The effect of the observer's presence in the observed classrooms

As the effect of the observer decreases over time (Masling and Stern 1969), I visited the senior class children once before the first direct observation relevant for my thesis, which was around Halloween (so late October 2017). Throughout the academic year I was usually accompanied by my research assistant, Eaten, who, as a young Chinese woman, did not stand out in the slightest. While the children were at first curious about my presence, especially in the public kindergartens where they did not have a foreign teacher, most of them had a private English teacher, so they were not overtly fascinated by my being in their classroom and behaved naturally. Regarding overcoming the language barrier, my Mandarin level allowed me to communicate with the subjects and correctly record the observed behaviour and their conversations. When the teachers or children spoke in the local dialect, namely Shanghainese, or said something I could not understand, I would ask my research assistant for clarifications.

Moreover, when making inferences in my analysis I took into consideration that the observed behaviour was, to a considerable extent, influenced by the children's interactions with their teachers, the activities chosen for the events in question, as well as, to a lesser extent, by the presence of an unknown observer. Because one instance of recording values-generating behaviour is not enough, I decided to observe three different events in each kindergarten, as well as interview the classroom teachers and collect parent questionnaires. Accordingly, the inferences I am drawing in the results chapters are based on a multifaceted analysis of countable, describable instances of behaviour exhibited by the children over time and in multiple settings.

3.6 Observational bias and inferences

There are several challenges to reliable observations, as errors can derive from the observer, the observed, and the observation system (Boehm and Weinberg 1997: 83). I tackled the first source of bias by slowly getting to know the children throughout the school year being mindful of the personal bias that could have occurred by unconsciously having certain expectations from a certain child/ teacher or classroom. According to Kerlinger (1973) and Kazdin (1992), the researcher can inadvertently use a filter while making observations, based on her previous experiences with the observed.^{xliiii} Hence, my goal was to remain as neutral as possible during my observations and remain aware of potential biases that might be associated with my gender, age, and cultural and ethnic identity. These subjective frames of reference could have affected not only my field notes, but also any inferences I made. Moreover, another potential source of personal bias was my theoretical perspective, as I had to ensure not to make any judgements regarding the value-based behaviour I will be recording.

Lynch and Hanson (1992) caution outside observers to take into account how the linguistic and cultural characteristics of a child's environment will influence observation. Hence, I considered how to best approach cultural and language differences in what I chose to observe, relying on my previous experience living and working in Shanghai, as well as on my Mandarin skills. Again, my assistant Eaten proved to be invaluable, as our open dialogue helped increase the reliability of my observations. I established a similar inter-observer agreement with the teachers by discussing my observations with them after every event, mostly for solving any linguistic misunderstanding I might have had.

Regarding bias related to the observed subject, also called reactivity, I was mindful not to influence the children's behaviour while I was observing them by choosing an unobtrusive spot in the classroom and during the planned activities. From my teaching experience, Chinese children are so used to being constantly watched and photographed that they have become

oblivious to it. However, pupils do tend to alter their usual behaviour in the presence of their classroom teachers, so I expected them to be more well-behaved and active during Circle Time and their lesson.

Concerning the observation system, I selected a system that matched my observational purposes, namely getting an understanding of the values and citizenship education, on the one hand, and Western culture, on the other, disseminated and internalised within a K2 setting. A useful tool to prevent observation bias is Boehm and Weinberger's checklist (1997: 87), as shown in Table 3.15 below. However, this table contains ideal observation criteria that I had to adjust during fieldwork according to occurring constraintwarywarys.

Drawing conclusions means I have to make inferences based on the recorded data. In order to ensure the recording of behaviour was as bias-free as possible being sensitive to and overcoming subjective frames of reference was of vital importance. Inference brings behaviour and construct together, 'making sense' of what we see and 'understanding' what we observe (McCutcheon 1981). My research focuses on the social importance and meaning of observed behaviours, as well as on linking observations to external considerations, such as values and citizenship education-related behaviour and the mainstream socialist discourse.

China's authoritarian regime generates a certain level of political sensitivity a Western researcher needs to take into account while conducting fieldwork. Additionally, I started my fieldwork in October 2017, so at a delicate time because of the 19th National Congress, when educational institutions were particularly wary of Western observers. I was careful not to raise any red flags towards the local authorities or the kindergarten gatekeepers, especially since my research applied a political filter to ECE by focusing on the dissemination of values and citizenship education correlated with the censorship of foreign holidays like Christmas, which the Centre had started to construct as facilitating the infiltration of liberalism into Chinese society. Also, I did not want to be perceived as a Western researcher with a certain agenda, like that of criticising China's political system or the shortcomings of the SEB and the observed local kindergartens to deliver quality education and meet the goals of the 2010 Education Reform. But for the occasions when I interviewed individuals I knew from the period I worked as a kindergarten teacher in Shanghai the majority of the interviewees, especially the three education officials and kindergarten management were quite keen on influencing my findings: the education officials shed a very positive light on the situation of ECE in Shanghai, each kindergarten principal promoted her kindergarten and stressed her allegiance to the official discourse in terms of an ideological alignment, and the class teachers were usually careful to not upset the principal by stepping out of line.

3.7 Conclusion

In terms of research methods data collection, the analysis is reliant on triangulation based on ECE policy documents,^{xliv} surveys in the form of parent questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with ECE officials, experts and kindergarten staff, direct observation, and analysis of preschool curricula and weekly lesson plans, as well as monitoring of social media posts in all five kindergartens. I applied thematic analysis to code the collected primary data according to themes and patterns generated by my research question. The ethnographic approach to the celebration of four local and Western festivals in the five preschools allowed me to gather a plethora of information, while granting me high levels of flexibility in terms of application and generating a permanent record of events and behaviours.

However, this method has several disadvantages, like longer time requirements, observer bias, as well as the impact of the observer on primary data (Dudovskiy 2016), which I did my best to address, as detailed above. As commonly done in the literature (e.g. Boehm

and Weinberg 1997) regarding ethical considerations, I endorsed the principles of informed consent, right to privacy, confidentiality, transparency and respect towards all my research participants. All the kindergarten names and those of my informants are anonymised, and I paid particular attention to not disclosing information that might jeopardise their anonymity, especially regarding kindergarten activities and related public social media posts (e.g. WeChat posts). Also, regarding the photographs included in the Appendices, I was given permission by the public kindergarten gatekeepers and parents, and blurred the individuals' faces in order to maintain their anonymity.

The greatest challenge I was faced with was gaining access to the five kindergartens and the only reason I got past the gatekeepers was because of the support of a good friend, Carol, who used her considerable connections to vouch for me. Because of her media background she also helped design and translate the information sheets and parent questionnaires in such a manner that my research topic was depoliticised and framed so as not to raise any red flags to either the preschool gatekeepers, interviewees, or local authorities. I consulted with her about the best way to interact with the kindergarten staff, management and parents in a manner that reflected local etiquette in terms of both behaviour and wording. Such a contact is extremely important when conducting research in China to avoid getting in trouble with the authorities, but also to get past gatekeepers and interview important individuals.

Moreover, from my experience with Chinese culture, there is a certain formality expected in an interview and one has to be very careful in phrasing questions, especially politically sensitive ones. I also took full advantage of my gender and appearance and projected a friendly, but a bit naïve personality, as well as my background as a teacher in Shanghai to put my sources at ease and encourage them to speak more candidly. This approach usually worked, as I noticed that after the first half-hour, when they were very conscious of their word choices, many loosened up and I got some truthful answers, not only politically correct ones.

My experience with interviewing local officials and academics was that they replicated the official rhetoric when answering politically sensitive questions, clearly repeating the official narrative and adopting its verbiage, but opened up when giving examples. In the case of the principals I spoke with, public kindergarten management was careful to portray their preschool in a favourable light and align with the dominant discourse disseminated by Space1, especially through the SEB and local education bureau. Thus, in my interviews with local kindergarten teachers I also noticed they were telling me what the principal had instructed them to say, as their personal agenda was to stay in the principal's good graces, and only after building a good rapport did I receive a more frank opinion. The situation in the two private kindergartens was different because of my previous ties with these centres – knowing most of the people I interviewed yielded more detailed and truthful answers, but management was still keen on maintaining their kindergartens' good reputation in the community. Moreover, despite my guaranteeing full anonymity, they were apprehensive I might reveal information that they did not want the Centre to know about, like the fact that in their case values and citizenship education was completely ignored in their bilingual streams in favour of imported Western curricula, like the IB PYP programme of Private2, or the unique American-British curriculum of Private1.

Chapter 4: Space1 – the Centre and its Legislative Control over ECE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the dominant discourse's nationalisation of ECE, particularly the control its ECE legislation exerts over kindergarten curricula and teaching patterns in terms of the dissemination of moral education. In this instance, sovereign or negative power is consciously exerted by a repressive state apparatus (Foucault 1981) in order to further its own interests, namely the cultivation of patriotic subjects. A Centre-Periphery lens (Figure 1.1 above) is used to focus on Beijing-generated national legislation, as well as on its interpretation and implementation at provincial level, creating a multifaceted picture of ECE policies and realities in Shanghai since 2006. I label this positioning Space1 – the Centre, and equate it with Beijing's ECE policies, but also their Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) responses (Space1.1) - especially the Three-Year Action Plans (STYAPs) - as well as, to a lesser extent, the influence local Communist Party branches exert over kindergarten management and teaching staff (Space1.2). Based on my fieldwork, especially the interviews with three local education officials, I decided to equate Beijing with the SEB and local education bureaus because I noticed there was negligible variation in terms of the latter actors' ideological alignment, as they consistently mirrored official rhetoric during interviews. While there is variation in terms of the curricula and teaching patterns used in Shanghai, especially given the metropole's long history of innovation regarding ECE, local officials showcased discursive conformity vis-a-vis the Centre, a key motivator being employment security, as well as a source of legitimacy for their opinion.

As posited in my Introduction chapter, my theoretical contribution builds on Foucault's (1969; 1980; 1983; 1991) relation between education and power, with kindergartens being analysed as privileged in-between and peripheral spaces in relationship with the official discourse on ECE, hence constructs where Beijing's homogenising power, acting mostly through local education bureaus, engages with local subjects, especially with kindergarten staff, parents, and children. Consequently, the observed kindergartens were chosen for their potential as places of resistance, based on the hypothesis that parents have great potential for agency in becoming important players in deciding what their children are learning and how (Lin 2007), thus actively reshaping local ECE patterns and curricula. Here I could capture more subtle avenues of power, namely how biopower is exercised over human bodies at the level of the individual through the exercise of disciplinary power (Foucault 1983; 1991).

However, my collected data from the three top public kindergartens observed strongly indicates that parents are more than happy with the *status quo* in terms of their children's education, acting like Foucauldian 'obedient bodies' (1983; 1991) subjected to the power of the kindergarten principals, the latter being fully aligned with official ECE policies and socialist ideology. In the case of the two elite private kindergartens, the situation is the complete opposite, as kindergarten management sees the parents as customers and is subservient to their preferences when choosing marketable curricula and teaching patterns. However, the Chinese teachers of Private1 kindergarten came across as very patriotic and supportive of the Party, subjects shaped by disciplinary power who were wary of their local education bureau, with their counterparts at Private2 the only ones more open to 'Western' cultural practices like Halloween and Christmas. The only group I found to be completely resistant to Space1's homogenising and disciplinary power were the native English teachers, who could not be shaped into obedient and patriotic subjects (Foucault 1991) given their Western identity and inability to speak Mandarin.

My analysis of both national and local ECE policies, complemented by expert interviews shows that, while hybrid local-global ECE trends were in place after the 2010 Education Reform, after the 19th National Congress the Centre has been pushing for more patriotic content in early education, amplifying Xi Jinping's slogan of moral education (Kuo 2019) while also explicitly trying to limit the dissemination of Western cultural content, especially that with religious undertones. I argue that, especially since the end of 2017, the Centre, aligned ideologically with Xi Jinping Thought (Buckley 2018), is actively striving to take back control over curricula content (particularly in public kindergartens), and is keener than ever to ensure that the next generations grow up faithful to the Party and taking pride in being Chinese. By analysing four rounds of STYAPs, as well as talking with education officials and ECE academics, I am confident that, at least at a discursive level, what the central government wants to do about ECE, as expressed in the 2010 Education Reform and successor policies, is mirrored in both the rhetoric and actions of the Shanghai municipal government. While this chapter also discusses the 2018 *Several Opinions on the Deepening Reform and Standard Development of Preschool Education* (State Council) and its impact on the latest STYAP (2019-2021), as my fieldwork encompassed the 2017-2018 academic year, I decided to only perfunctorily expand on legislation that succeeded this focus period.

Regarding the structure of this chapter, it operates with the first of the three defined spaces of analysis, namely Space1 or the Centre - Beijing, and its two reaching arms at the provincial and district levels, Shanghai, and local education bureaus (Space1.1) and the local Party branches (Space1.2), each in an individual section. The first part discusses the most relevant national policies for ECE shaping kindergarten realities in 2017 (the time of my fieldwork), so the four macro-documents of the 2010 Education Reform and their successors, as well as interviews assessing the impact of the 19th NCCCP on the five observed preschools. To understand how the Centre wants to increase its control over ECE promoting moral education, the analysis is narrowed down to values and citizenship education, of key interest being whether the 12 core socialist values are taught in the selected kindergartens.

Because of a decentralised education landscape Beijing expects local governments to implement national legislation, so in the next section I tackled Space1.1, namely the SEB and local education bureaus, which I label 'the reaching arms of the Centre.' Here I look at the four consecutive rounds of STYAPs and any reference to moral education, as well as how this local legislation is perceived and implemented through the insight of three education officials, one from the SEB (municipal level) and two working for the Minhang Education Bureau (district level). The interviews indicate a continuum between Shanghai and Beijing in terms of how macro policy goals are reflected in local legislation and that, at least in Shanghai, the official discourse perceives ECE as a public good.

In the last section the highlight is on Space1.2, so local CP branches and their ties with (especially public) kindergartens, showing the clearly political link between ECE politics and the Centre's intentions to control the content of core ECE curriculum, as the observed public kindergartens have strong ties with their local/ district's Party branches. Additional proof of this connection is the 2011 document, *Suggestions on Strengthening Party Building Work for Teachers in Public Kindergartens*, which sets out strategies for building a patriotic kindergarten teaching staff.

4.2 Space 1: The Centre - Beijing and its 2010 Education Reform

I started the analysis of the Centre's exercise of control over kindergartens by looking at its national dimension, as captured in the legislative content of the 2010 Education Reform. This educational cornerstone revolved around four macro-documents, with the *Development*

Plan and the *Outline* constituting the core documents of overarching policy, the *State Council Opinions* providing more detail on their implementation, and the *Guidelines* focusing on curriculum development (Table 1.1 below). The reform is an educational landmark, particularly for ECE, as the official discourse defined education as “*the cornerstone of national rejuvenation and social progress, [...] vital for achieving the goal of building a harmonious and well-off society*” (Development Plan, Preamble: 2010). The *2010 Development Plan* stipulated that China’s educational system was outdated and in need of reform, both to respond to the public’s demand for quality education and ensure the cultivation of an internationally competitive human capital as the most important resource driving China’s socio-economic development.

The 2010 reform was very ambitious, its over-arching goal being to significantly contribute to “*the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the progress of human civilization,*” (Development Plan, Preamble), setting the deadline for reaching the target of modernising education to 2020.^{xlv} It continues to be the most important legislation, to date, its goals being fully supported by Xi, thus being one of the few policies transcending the Party leadership change. While its policies addressed all education stages, compulsory and higher education were targeted, which remains the trend. However, early education was also strongly represented, especially compared to previous education-related documents, where it was mostly ignored. Hence, within a decade, China planned to popularise kindergarten education, offering one year of preschool education across China, and three years in developed (tier one) cities like Shanghai. In line with Prof. Liu (EE6), an ECE expert from a leading Chinese university, the Centre has also been guiding this nation-wide education reform with a populist discourse infused with key terms like inclusiveness and public welfare (also contained in the *2018 Opinions on Preschool Education*), which, at least in the case of Shanghai, have proven very successful in both practice (a 99% enrolment in 2017, according to SEB official Huang (EO1) and garnering the public’s trust and support (ME5).

4.2.1 The National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan 2010-2020 (the Development Plan)

The 2010 Development Plan was a response to the 17th National Congress’s recommendation to “*prioritize the development of education and build a country with strong human resources*” (Preamble) as an efficient strategy to accelerate the process of socialist modernisation. Its goal was to ensure a better access to early childhood programmes nationwide by the year 2020, its main target being the development of quality ECE. This analysis shows that its policies were shaped by a socialist discourse infused with patriotic language, its populist nature and repetitive and ambiguous terminology making the proposed strategies very difficult to be consistently and successfully implemented across China. More detailed policies were developed in three complementary documents, each using the same discursive ethos, the latter being tackled in separate sections below. I argue that the Centre used an effusive but ambiguous discourse on purpose, with the reasoning that open-ended interpretations facilitate implementation locally, at least on paper. The researcher posits this document had little bearing on Shanghai, as the city had already been operating according to a Three-Year Action Plan since 2006 (its first STYAP, 2006-2008). Moreover, the interviewed local education officials and kindergarten principals stated that Shanghai was already at 99% kindergarten enrolment of Shanghai residents in 2017, and that ECE was already considered a public good by the SEB and local education bureaus (e.g. E01; EO3).

The 2010 Development Plan,^{xlvi} which basically only provides general guidelines regarding the reform of ECE, is complemented by an *Outline*, the latter expanding on the Plan’s strategic objectives, main tasks, as well as major measures and projects. The two documents

use similar language, with many key words and phrases being identical, especially those regarding their guiding ideology. In addition, they have the same content and format structure, addressing the same issues and with an identical number of chapters (22). As a result, I mainly focused on the 2010 Development Plan,^{xlvii} and just touched upon the Outline. The aim was to see how the socialist agenda driving the reform of preschool education was formulated in the rhetoric of this document, as well as what the implementation strategies for a more patriotic early education were.

According to this legislation, until 2010 Chinese education followed the development path of “*socialist education with Chinese characteristics*” (Preamble), but, in order to remain relevant in a multipolar and globalised world shaped by fierce talent competition, China needed to reform its national education policy by “*improving the quality of the people and cultivating innovative talents [via] a modern education system with Chinese characteristics*” (Ibid.). This stipulation regarding the need to continue to disseminate a values-based discourse was the first piece of evidence I found to support that the regime noticed the importance of promoting modern ECE, but still wanted to ensure this new direction continued to contain Chinese characteristics at its core. Nevertheless, the document failed to clearly define the now ubiquitous ‘Chinese characteristics’ phrase, leaving both the researcher and also policy-makers and ECE scholars open to interpret what ‘modern education’ and ‘Chinese characteristics’ should look like in the context of ECE curricula and teaching patterns.^{xlviii}

A significant clue as to what the Centre wanted the desired nation-wide curriculum content for ECE to look like is found in the document’s Guiding Ideology section.^{xlix} The latter stipulates in no uncertain terms that the dominant discourse aligns itself ideologically with socialism with Chinese characteristics based on Deng Xiaoping Theory and the thinking of the Three Represents. Of interest is that this ideological discourse is identical with the one used in the 2006-2008 STYAP, but that the most recent nation-wide legislation for ECE, the 2018 *Several Opinions on the Development of Preschool Education*, only mentions Xi Jinping Thought on socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and prioritises “*the cultivation of people with morality*” (Overall Requirements).

The 2010 Development Plan specifically addresses preschool education in Chapter 3, where three articles tackle basic universal preschool education (Art. 5), clarify government responsibilities (art. 6), and the development of rural preschool education (Art.7), with the first two of interest to this research.¹ ECE is thus defined as a very important stage for “*children’s physical and mental health, habit formation and intellectual development,*” with the Centre aiming at popularising at least one year of preschool enrolment by 2020. For Shanghai, a tier one city, the goal was ensuring access to three years of preschool education. Moreover, the language used in art. 5 to guide ECE reform became the norm in subsequent STYAPs, namely to “*safeguard children’s physical and mental development, adhere to the method of scientific education, and ensure the happy and healthy growth of young children.*” The researcher came across this exact language of the official rhetoric being replicated both by local education officials and the three interviewed public kindergarten management personnel, an expected discourse, as both sets of actors acted like obedient bodies mirroring the Centre’s position within the spatiality of an authoritarian state.

Hence, the 2010 Development Plan proposed an education reform that combined the general concept of scientific development with socialist education with Chinese characteristics and delegated its implementation to local authorities - the Shanghai and local education bureaus (Space1.1), in the case of this analysis - without actually clarifying what these targets were or how they were to be achieved. I argue that policy makers purposefully used an ambiguous but exceedingly patriotic terminology to reinforce the meta-narrative of an omnipotent Party. Moreover, the Centre left the development and implementation of these guidelines to local bodies to both give them more freedom to accommodate local needs and particularities, as well

as to ensure these targets will be met, at least on paper, by 2020. If the legislation itself is driven by a patriotic narrative, replicating its discursive language in succeeding legislation ensures that its lofty goals can be accomplished within a decade, if not in practice, then at least discursively. In other words, who could say these national targets have not been met on time, as dictated by the Centre, if each locality has its own interpretation of what these aims are and also aligns to the use of the same dominant discourse terminology to describe its achievements?

In contrast, the ideological direction of the 2010 Education Reform is clear and emphasised repeatedly. Art. 69 focuses on ways to strengthen the role of the Party in education, in order to preserve and continue to disseminate an “*in-depth study of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Three Represents and the scientific development concept.*” One of its purposes is thus to “*promote the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics into the textbooks, into the classroom, and into the mind [and] deepen the study and education of the socialist core value system*” (Art. 69). Nonetheless, this emphasis on Party ideology promotion is focused on higher education and primary and secondary school, without any mention of preschool education. The concern with ECE as a space for starting to build patriotic citizens is addressed in subsequent policies and official directives at the local level, which fall under the authority of the SEB and local education bureaus (Space 1.1), dimension that is analysed later in this chapter.

4.2.2 The Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan 2010-2020 (the Outline)

The implementation of the 2010 Development Plan was detailed in the *Outline*, which was the first medium- and long-term education planning outline for the 21st century. Under a socialist lens, the document had clear targets and it stipulated that all localities should put forward specific plans and measures for its implementation, organising them in stages that suited local circumstances. Moreover, it encouraged localities to explore and innovate when implementing the reform.

Compared with the Development Plan, this document provided guidelines in terms of practicalities, or how to achieve the reform’s goals by 2020.^{li} The overarching target regarding ECE combined the popularisation of preschool education with its modernisation, the latter defined as the creation of a society rich in internationally competitive talent (Guiding Ideology). In terms of a values discourse, the key terms were ‘popularisation and inclusiveness’ (*puji puhui* 普及普惠), and ‘social welfare’ (*shehui gongyi* 社会公益), which I took as proof that ECE is defined as a public good. Moreover, the education reform was guided by a core socialist values system which was integrated into the whole process of national education. This ideological component was combined with the ‘scientific quality’ concept, the latter seen as providing the much-needed vitality to spruce up Chinese ECE and make it internationally relevant. While this scientific concept is not clearly defined, the Work Guidelines mention that it is the (pre)schools’ responsibility to “*develop these characteristics, set high standards, produce famous teachers, and educate talents.*”

A noteworthy point is made in Chapter 2, “Strategic Objectives and Themes,” where the Centre’s vision to build a complete and lifelong education model is outlined. The policy states that academic and non-academic education should be coordinated, as vocational education and general education communicate with each other, and everything from preschool education to post-employment education should be effectively linked. This desire for interconnected education targeting all ages is underpinned by the overarching goal set by the Development Plan, namely to cultivate people who adhere to moral education. The Outline’s strategic objective is thus to “*strengthen education in ideals and beliefs and moral education and strengthen students’ beliefs and confidence in the leadership of the Communist Party of China*

and the socialist system.” The implication is that this ideological direction will make Chinese education a blend of modern education with Chinese characteristics, ensuring that China’s human capital is globally competitive while retaining a patriotic core.

4.2.3 Several Opinions of the State Council on the Current Development of Preschool Education (State Council Opinions)

The *State Council Opinions* is a three-stage document (2011-2013; 2014-2016; 2017-2020) published in November 2010 as an answer to the Development Plan (published in July), fully embracing the latter’s patriotic verbiage and lofty national goals for ECE. This document, also called the *State Council Document 41*, is crucial for understanding the legislative background of ECE, as it expanded on the Development Plan and Outline’s guidelines by targeting preschool education exclusively.

In addition, for the first time in the history of Chinese ECE, it treated preschool education as “*an important measure for protecting and improving people’s lives*” (Zhou 2015: 32). I consider it to be the most relevant macro-document to fully grasp the significance of the 2010 Education Reform, because of its 10-point strategy to promote ECE development by 2020, as well as its assertive discourse, defining preschool education as “*the beginning of lifelong learning, an important part of the national education system, and an important social welfare undertaking*” (Issue1). This document is proof that Space1 started looking at preschool education as a public good since 2010, and that it has been putting in place legislation to facilitate access to this education service to the ordinary Chinese, as it “*strives to build a public service system for preschool education covering urban and rural areas with reasonable layout, to ensure that school-aged children receive basic and quality preschool education*” (Issue1). Moreover, it outlined the “*urgency to vigorously develop [preschool education] as a major livelihood project to build a harmonious socialist society*” (Issue1).

The State Council Opinions put in place a nation-wide strategy to guide the development of ECE by 2020 by addressing the 10 issues listed in Table 4.1 [below](#), with goals that were a lot more tangible than what was previously outlined in the Development Plan and its corresponding Outline. The goals are repeated, verbatim, in the subsequent STYAPs, both at municipal and district levels. Specifically, it encouraged all sectors of society to participate in the development of ECE by mentioning the importance of social participation and privately-run kindergartens, but within a government-led framework. Within this proposed setting, the responsibility of accomplishing this reform and ensuring its ideological alignment with the nation-wide strategic goal of cultivating patriotic citizens who trust the Party and the socialist system (see Outline) fell onto the shoulders of the local education bureaus.

The development of ECE, in line with this document, was driven by scientific development,^{lii} but was also sensitive to local conditions and aimed at providing convenience and flexibility to young children and their parents. In terms of a proposed teaching pattern, it had to “*adhere to scientific parenting, follow the rules of children’s physical and mental development, and promote the healthy and happy growth of young children*” (Issue 1).

While recognising that preschool education had made considerable progress since the start of the 21st century, it stressed that ECE remained a weak link in overall education, mainly because of a lack of investment and available resources, inadequate or insufficient teaching staff, and unbalanced urban and rural development. Hence, quality preschool education was seen as directly linked to the “*healthy growth of hundreds of millions of children, the vital interests of thousands of families, and the future of the country and the nation*” (Issue 1).

Regarding preschool funding, the document stipulated that governments at all levels had to include preschool education funds in their budget, and that new funding should be driven towards preschool education (Issue 2). Another recommendation was to divert the surplus

education resources from compulsory education to kindergartens, as well as for government spending to increase significantly during this period, starting with the first stage of 2011 to 2013.

In 2011, the relevant state departments at provincial level introduced measures for the management of kindergarten fees, according to local socio-economic conditions, affordability, and kindergarten running costs (Issue 7). The State Council advised them to formulate standards for public kindergartens in accordance with the principle of reasonable sharing of education costs by non-compulsory education families, as well as increase the management of private kindergarten fees. The Centre's concern to make kindergarten enrolment accessible across China was another policy guideline that strengthens my argument that public preschool education is becoming a public good, especially in developed areas, and has been a public good in Shanghai well before the 2010 Education Reform.^{liii}

The last point addressed was the implementation of three-year action plans, which fell to the responsibility of local governments, after conducting in-depth investigations of local conditions. These local actors were held accountable by the Centre - Beijing for setting the end objectives and annual tasks, as well as ensuring the necessary kindergarten funds and preparing locality-specific action plans (Issue 10). Hence, the local governments were designated as the main bodies responsible for developing preschool education and solving the problem of enrolment difficulties, quality education and curriculum content.

Overall, the State Council Opinions continued in the vein of the Development Plan and Outline, supporting a scientific development of preschool education while respecting local conditions and needs.

4.2.4 National Guidelines for Early Childhood Learning and Development 2010 (the Guidelines)

As a means to understand the theoretical framework behind the 2010 Education Reform one has to look at the *National Guidelines for Early Childhood Learning and Development* (the Guidelines). This legislation specified the criteria for ensuring children's physical and mental development, the need to pay attention to individual differences, as well as the use of games and play as the main teaching method. Moreover, the document talked about improving kindergarten equipment and teaching aids, creating a colourful educational environment, and, most importantly, prohibiting them from teaching primary-school level subjects like Maths and Chinese character writing. The 'against-subject learning' policy is still in place and forbids kindergartens from teaching young children using teaching patterns appropriate for primary school, as well as content that is suitable for much older learners, so as to ensure an age-appropriate and balanced development (EO1; EO3), but this continues to be the case in many elite kindergartens because of parental demand.

A progressive concept is the need for a rapprochement between preschool education and family education, to create a nurturing environment for the healthy growth of young children. Its implementation was guaranteed through the mechanisms established in the State Council Opinions, namely for communities and parents to participate in kindergarten management and supervision. This point was already translated into reality in all the observed kindergartens in Shanghai, as all of them have a classroom parent committee, a space for volunteer parents to get involved in kindergarten life. However, in the case of the observed public kindergartens I discovered that the parents are devoid of agency when it comes to proposals to change the curriculum or teaching patterns. They are active participants only to the extent that they help the teachers organise fieldtrips and events, as well as volunteer to teach classes and chaperone when needed. While public kindergartens give out biannual parent questionnaires asking for the parents' feedback on a variety of topics, a requirement stemming from the local education

bureaus (PU2K12), who then collected and analyse the data at municipal level, my fieldwork in 2017-2018 could not verify whether it was having an impact on ECE policy reviews in Shanghai, or that it was taken into consideration by the kindergartens in their annual curricula adjustments.

4.2.5 Local education officials and ECE experts' views on the 2010 Education Reform

To capture the power dynamics between Space1 and the Shanghai (SEB) and local education bureaus, on the one hand, and ECE realities in Shanghai, on the other, in terms of the implementation of the 2010 Education Reform, I carried out five expert interviews. I succeeded in talking with one education official from the SEB and two public servants from the Minhang Education Bureau (MEB) (where both private kindergartens are located), as well as two ECE academics from two leading Chinese universities. In order to maintain their anonymity I use pseudonyms and do not provide details that might make them easily identifiable. The topics we discussed are: (1) the condition of ECE in Shanghai, tied in with the notion of (2) ECE as a public good; (3) the 2020 goals for ECE as per the 2010 reform; and (4) the 2015-2017 Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (the fourth topic being discussed in Section 4.3.3)

4.2.5.1 The condition of ECE in Shanghai

According to education official Huang, early education in Shanghai has been experiencing a series of reforms for the last 20 years, as judged by the increasingly closer relationship between the concept of ECE in China and the international mainstream (EO1). In her opinion, both education experts and education officials are working on developing city-wide teaching patterns that are child-driven:

“In the past, teachers used the same goals and lesson content, with the same speed and judgement for the entire class. Under such circumstances, children did not have any self-awareness. In the last two years (2015 onwards), there has been a shift from collective teaching to more focus on individual study and giving 45 minutes a day for children to learn freely in an area of their choice” (EO1).

Hence, the official discourse is aware that traditional Chinese teaching practices inherited from the Soviet teaching method were teacher-centred and are actively shifting to a child-driven approach: *“In recent years, we have been trying to consider children's views and how to design different classes for every child, in order to let them like the class, be willing to learn and stimulate their potential”* (EO1).

Discussing the official early education curriculum in Shanghai, public servant Huang admitted it was not completely child-oriented, but that children's individual development was being taken into account a lot more than in the past. Also, the teachers are given more freedom to develop their own lessons, even though they have to follow both local and national curriculum guidelines, reality the researcher can confirm in all the observed public kindergartens. While public kindergartens are developing their unique curricula, it remains a balancing act between using the compulsory SEB-approved textbooks, official curriculum guidelines, as well as the teachers' individual input. Given that the teachers have a degree of agency in designing their lessons, as the researcher discovered during interviews with senior class (K2) teachers and by looking at their weekly lesson plans, it made sense for Space1.2 - local CP branches, to keep an eye on this actor and strive to ensure, through legislation like the 2011 *Suggestions on Strengthening Party Building Work for Teachers in Public Kindergartens* that the teaching staff are not only patriotic themselves, but that they cultivate patriotic students as well.

In line with Prof. Zhang (EE7), an ECE expert from a leading Shanghainese university, there is no unique and cohesive Chinese pattern being developed, but the current education concept in China is driven by scientific development, as well as international education patterns like Multiple Intelligences, STEM, and ‘New Zealand’s story time approach’. Because of China’s vastness, she believes that every locality should have a learning characteristic based on its particularities, like ethnic and traditional customs, while maintaining a shared scientific core addressing children’s development, to ensure their physical and psychological well-being: *“we should follow the general rule of child development to build the core curriculum, but at the same time there must be something about their own Han nationality or minority characteristics, some local flavour”* (EE7). Moreover, Beijing is reinforcing its *against-subject learning* policy, actively working through the local education bureaus to ascertain that children are mainly taught through games and play and not using a rigid primary-school approach (EO3).

For education official Bai from the MEB, although preschool education in China does not belong to compulsory education, at least in Shanghai it has been brought into the public service system (EO2). She stressed that there are dual forces driving the development of ECE in the city, namely the local government, working mainly through education bureaus, but also social participation. The government’s reasoning in encouraging this cooperation is that the preschool sector needs private investment to develop and cater to an increasing number of children, as most of the public funding goes to compulsory education. The informant labelled this system a ‘multi-school model,’ where the Centre encourages and nurtures the existence of a wide variety of preschool types in Shanghai. However, as I show in my analysis of private kindergartens (Chapter 7), while Beijing is supporting an increase in the number of private kindergartens to cope with a higher demand for early education, it has also taken a keener interest in what these kindergartens are teaching, especially since late 2017. Hence, private kindergartens have started to be under the scrutiny of local education bureaus in terms of the curricula they are using, with Space1’s aim being to limit the dissemination of Western cultural values.

All five interviewees used the same discourse in describing early education in Shanghai, aligning with both the terminology and the goals expressed in the 2010 Education Reform. They agreed that early education in Shanghai is no longer *“a rigid, teacher-driven affair, with little space for child agency”* (EE6), but well on its way to becoming the plethora of quality education approaches found in Western countries. Given that three of the informants are public servants and work for education bureaus, while the other two are prominent academics, it came as no surprise that they aligned with the dominant discourse and had only positive things to say about the situation of ECE in Shanghai. Their opinion is best captured by official Hei’s statement, as follows: *“Maybe Shanghai has to compete with Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces in nine-year compulsory education, but it is still far ahead in terms of ECE. Early education in Shanghai is the best in China”* (EO3).

4.2.5.2 ECE as a public good in Shanghai

Regarding the issue of whether ECE is a public good in Shanghai, education official Bai stressed the city’s particular situation, noting that, compared to nation-wide, it is an exception when it comes to its focus on quality preschool education (EO2). In her eyes, in other provinces the local government does not pay much attention to this education sector, preferring to use its budget on compulsory education. However, since its first STYAP (2006-2008), Shanghai has been investing more and more in developing a quality-driven early education service accessible to all *hukou*-holders, with *“the local government being the leading actor in ensuring inclusiveness, fairness and accessibility”* (EO2). As reinforced by public servant Huang, the

government is playing the main role in ECE in Shanghai, especially in terms of investing in public kindergartens (EO1). She mentioned that there was a 10% annual increase in public kindergarten financing since 2006, as well as a push for building more public kindergartens. In 2017, 63% of the kindergartens in Shanghai were public ones, number that, according to her, shows the government's sense of responsibility, especially since the public is guaranteed low tuition fees. A level one class one kindergarten charged between 700 and 900 RMB/ month, while an equivalent private kindergarten could ask for as much as 15,000 RMB/ month (ME5).

The high number and standards of public kindergartens in Shanghai is a point of pride for both the SEB and its district branches, especially in the context of *“other provinces having given up on ECE, forced to use their limited education budget on improving nine-year compulsory education”* (EO3). For official Hei this decision has had a negative effect on early education outside Shanghai, as public kindergartens were sold to private investors, thus leading to an imbalance between public and private ECE services in other provinces (EO3). Her opinion that ECE is a public good in Shanghai is supported by her colleague, Ms. Bai, who argues that the local government realised that ECE should be part of public welfare and thus fall under the responsibility of the Centre: *“It is our responsibility to maintain 60-70% of the total number of kindergartens as public ones, as it benefits citizens directly because they can use the least money to get the best education”* (EO2).

In line with local education official Bai, the rapid development in the last few years, both in terms of the number of kindergartens and ECE policies in Shanghai, is more irrefutable proof that the local government is constructing a solid framework of early education as a public service, accessible to anyone who is a permanent resident (EO2). Prof. Liu, a well-known ECE academic teaching at a local university, also confirmed that preschool education is considered a public good by Space1.1, as *“the government should and does provide quality and accessible education for children 0-6, as this is a key developmental stage when we should make sure our children get the best start in life”* (EE6).

4.2.5.3 2020 ECE Goals in Shanghai

Concerning my question whether the 2020 ECE goals set by the 2010 Reform were achievable in the case of Shanghai, official Huang said that the target of 99% enrolment in three years of kindergarten education had already been reached by 2017, but only for the resident population. She argued that, because of the large number of migrants, the government could not guarantee preschool enrolment for all of them:

“If these migrants meet certain requirements,^{liv} their need for kindergarten education has already been satisfied, even though, most of the time, their children are enrolled in level three public kindergartens, or private ones that have ties with their local government, so inclusive private kindergartens” (EO1).

The latter is the case with Private1, which, in 2016 was pressured by the MEB to open more Chinese stream classrooms to cater to the needs of the local residents, at much lower tuition fees than those charged for the bilingual stream, matching those of a public kindergarten of the same rank (PR1K20; PR1K21).

Official Huang also emphasized that, even though Shanghai was a *comprehensive education reform experimental zone* for the country, meaning they are spearheading ECE research, they still followed the central government's requirements, as expressed in the 2010 China Dream for education, which focused on disseminating high moral values and cultivating patriotic people (EO1). Consequently, Shanghai is seen as playing a leading, exploratory role in terms of early education, going beyond blindly following the nation-wide ECE guidelines, while maintaining a socialist ideological core. According to the official discourse, as expressed

by her, Shanghai focuses on promoting local values and preserving local culture and traditions, while, at the same time, being shaped by international ECE trends:

“In Shanghai we communicate with the whole world, while the whole country may still have a long way to go. The central government gives us the decision-making power to decide what curriculum adaptations to make. In Shanghai, there are local activities in each kindergarten, children can make their own choices and explore whatever they are interested in. Comparatively speaking, we share the nation-wide comprehensive requirements and the China Dream, but we still have a lot of room for exploration and experimentation” (EO1).

This point of view was also reinforced by Public2’s Vice-principal Hua, who emphasized that, in terms of ECE, Shanghai was a special case different from the rest of the country, as:

“The year we started to focus on early education was definitely not 2010, but way before that. Shanghai is a leader in China for the development of education for 3-6-year-olds. A lot of regions in the whole country are learning from Shanghai, which is a model for quality ECE and has a great reputation world-wide. A large amount of equipment and investment are supported by the local government. Shanghai is open to change and is also a road opener. Nowadays, the majority of children are guaranteed a place in a public preschool and have access to quality education” (PU2K13).

Such statements can be understood as an oblique recognition of a distinct Shanghainese identity but expressed in instrumentalist terms. As such, Shanghai is portrayed as a sort of vanguard for China as a whole, implicitly part of the Centre’s homogenous narrative of nationhood, rather than possessing real cultural distinctiveness.

4.2.6 Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Standard Development of Preschool Education (2018)

The most recent nationwide document regulating the direction of ECE reform is *Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Standard Development of Preschool Education*, issued by the Central Committee and the State Council in 2018. This document defined ECE as “*an important social public welfare undertaking*” and a major commitment of the 19th National Congress to ensure the future of the Party (Introduction). This legislation confirms my hypothesis that Space1 has started to increase its control over kindergartens because it sees this first stage of education as a key component in ensuring the cultivation of socialist builders.

Nationwide, the two main challenges to creating quality and inclusive ECE are “*difficulty in entering kindergartens*” and “*expensive access to kindergarten,*” which the Centre is planning on addressing by optimising kindergarten layouts, supplying more resources and investment for ECE and building more kindergartens (especially inclusive private kindergartens), as well as ensuring that kindergartens do not teach primary school subjects and maintain affordable fees. The guiding ideology is Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, in line with Xi Jinping Thought, with the key goal of “*laying a solid foundation for training socialist builders and successors with all-round moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour development*” (National Conference on Education, Beijing: 10 September 2018).

The three main objectives build on the goals of the 2010 Education Reform, aiming at 85% enrolment in three-year preschool education nationwide by 2020, with 80% being either public or inclusive private kindergartens, thus having affordable tuition fees. This would ensure a ‘public service system’ for ECE, with Space1 already assessing these preschools as having a standardised behaviour by using a core curriculum (like the SEB-approved Learning Activities teachers manual – *xuexi huodong* 学习活动). Secondly, ECE staff, estimated at about 1.5 million principals and teachers, would receive more training especially regarding maintaining curriculum standards. Moreover, legislation like the *Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers* (2018) targets the formation of a patriotic staff by

‘strengthening moral education to cultivate people’ (*lideshuren* 立德树人). Third, by 2035 three-year ECE will be fully universal.

This section looks at Space1 and key national legislation on ECE since 2010, especially its ideological alignment to promote a modern ECE with Chinese Characteristics, underpinned by Mao Zhedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Thought and the Three Represents and, most recently, Xi Jinping Thought. The dominant discourse’s main goal is to cultivate moral citizens (e.g. 2010 Development Plan; 2018 State Council Opinions) by prioritising early education to ensure allegiance to the Party in future generations (2010 Outline) by creating a harmonious socialist society (2010 State Council Opinions) from the earliest stage of human development. In line with the five ECE experts I interviewed, Shanghai is a leader of ECE experimentation in China and had already met the 2020 goals of the reform by 2017. Moreover, the local government defines preschool education as a public good and is committed to increasing its quality and affordability to all hukou-holders.

To look at the local forces shaping ECE in Shanghai, especially the dissemination of values and citizenship education, I proceeded to analyse four rounds of STYAPs, as well as the local government’s views on these pieces of legislation. The next part discusses Space1.1, so Shanghai and local education bureaus, comparing local legislation with its interpretation by experts and implementation in the field.

4.3 Space1.1: The Shanghai and Local Education Bureaus

The next section looks at the four rounds of STYAPs that were developed at the municipal level between 2006-2008, 2011-2013, 2015-2017, and 2019-2021. These documents contain the SEB’s overall vision for ECE for the municipality, but most district education bureaus also develop their own, tailored documents, in order to better address their district’s local needs. Given the length constraints of this thesis, the researcher made the decision to only address the STYAPs, without including the analysis of district-level action plans.^{iv} I have read all the available legislation on ECE in Shanghai since 2006 and have come to the conclusion that the district Three-Year Action Plans not only contain the same key legislation, but use the terminology of the STYAPs, as well as the ideological framework of all the relevant ECE documents starting with the 2010 Education Reform.

4.3.1 The first Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan for Preschool Education (2006-2008 STYAP)

The first STYAP (2006-2008) defined preschool education as an important component of basic education, whose development was key in “*promoting the harmonious development of children’s minds and bodies, in achieving a balanced development of education, in improving the overall quality of the people, as well as ensuring education that is satisfactory to the people*” (Guiding Ideology). According to this document, there was already great progress in Shanghai toward achieving these goals by 2006, due to the cooperation between the district and county-level governments, municipal government committees, offices, and bureaus. This assessment was corroborated by the interviewed ECE experts and kindergarten principals, who all agreed that Shanghai has a long history of ECE investment and development, which started long before the 2010 Education Reform. Local official Bai, for example, went so far as to state that Shanghai was a leader in ECE development in China and served as a model for inspiring the 2010 ECE reform, with many of the 2020 goals having already been achieved in Shanghai by 2010 (EO2).

The document itself already mentioned an ECE reform being in progress before 2006, aimed at reshaping the curriculum based on children’s development and a diversified

investment in both public and private kindergartens, complemented by cultivating a team of dedicated teachers. The main challenge was how to respond adequately to the public's increased demand for high-quality ECE, demand seen as stemming from Shanghai's rapid economic and social development. For example, because of the expansion of the city's urban layout and increased natality rates, some areas were flagged as facing the problem of insufficient preschool education resources. Consequently, the 2006 STYAP was developed with addressing two challenges in mind, namely solving the problem of insufficient resources for preschool education (especially in Shanghai's new districts, like Minhang), and further improving the quality of ECE.

Its underlying ideology was Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Three Represents, combined with the same general 'scientific development' reference that was prevalent in the subsequent 2010 Education Reform.^{lvi} Its main goal of actively promoting ECE development was linked with ensuring public welfare, promoting balance, and stimulating vitality, as it defined ECE as important to ensuring that children from birth to six years of age grow healthily (Guiding Ideology). Its main policy provisions and aims were also later reflected in the nationwide 2010 reform, as follows: (1) providing preschool education for children of all ages, with equal conditions and equal opportunities for enrolment, (2) expanding quality preschool education resources, and (3) improving ECE in rural areas. The 2006 STYAP also had six specific, but realistic objectives, with a well-developed legislative background turn them into reality (Table 4.2 below).

This legislation contained the main measures needed to ensure its implementation. There was a checks-and-balances system set in place, with the SEB in charge of macro-planning, policy formulation, overall coordination and supervision of ECE development, and supporting the more struggling districts and counties to promote the development of preschool education.^{lvii} However, the main body responsible for the implementation of these measures according to local conditions was the district or county government. Hence, the aim was to create a government-led but flexible and diverse preschool education model. The role of the district or county government was to scientifically and reasonably determine the proportion and standards of kindergartens needed, then encourage social forces to organize preschool education, provide equal admission opportunities for children of all ages, and ensure the children's entry needs for families with financial difficulties were met (Main Measures). According to the researcher, these measures are an indicator that, at least in Shanghai, ECE was treated as a public good as early as 2006, given that the government aimed at ensuring that all, regardless of their socio-economic background, had access to kindergarten education by guaranteeing "*three years of preschool education for more than 98% of the school-aged children with a Shanghai household registration or holding a Shanghai residence permit*" (Specific Objectives).

Regarding the improvement of the quality of education, one provision was to develop a child-driven curriculum which ensured children's physical and mental development, nurturing "*the basic qualities of a healthy and lively development*" (Main Measures). Moreover, demonstration kindergartens played a leading role in curriculum reform, education research, and teacher training. Because of this, I selected to observe Public1, a famous demonstration kindergarten in Shanghai.

Another provision showed the modern educational trend embraced by Shanghainese ECE, as the 2006 STYAP mentioned the goal of gradually building a preschool education information network service system covering the whole city, which would act as an ECE service platform for educators and parents. Leading kindergartens would be involved in setting up a platform for exchanges with other preschool education institutions both at home and abroad, the aim being to strengthen ECE. I saw this strategy being implemented during my fieldwork, as Public1 and Public3 kindergartens both hosted conferences and exchange

programmes with experts from China and Western countries. Many leading kindergartens in Shanghai are involved in training, conferences and events revolving around developing quality ECE (ME5; ES4).

Increased publicity also played an important role in this legislation, as the local government and local media were required to vigorously promote the significance of developing preschool education, as well as the government's achievements in this sector. This strategy is still being implemented, a good example being the Shanghai Media Group's (SMG) coverage of special activities in kindergartens (especially during major festivals like China's National day and the Chinese New Year), which took place in 2017-2018 (ME5).

4.3.2 The second Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan for Preschool Education (2011-2013 STYAP)

The second STYAP (2011-2013) continued to deal with the two main challenges of its precursor, the need to effectively respond to higher birth rates and demand for quality education but labelled them as 'new challenges.' Nonetheless, this legislation recognised that considerable progress had already been made as a result of the implementation of the previous action plan, especially because of increased government funding and the construction of 400 new kindergartens (Basic Situation). By 2013, the Shanghai government was planning to build new kindergartens, facilitate the training of qualified ECE teachers, and respond to the increased demand for kindergarten places (Table 4.3 below), which it succeeded in doing, as expressed in two following rounds of STYAPs (see latest figures in Table 4.5 below).

Chapter 1, the "Basic Situation," assessed that, in 2010, the overall kindergarten enrolment rate in Shanghai was already 98%, close to the 100% goal set by the Education Reform to be reached by 2020. There were 1,252 kindergartens and 1,709 preschool centres (some kindergartens have more than one campus), including 396 private kindergartens (31.6% of the total), served by 40,900 kindergarten teachers and staff, including 26,700 full-time teachers.^{lviii} There were 383 level one kindergartens, 30.59% of the total number, including 26 private kindergartens.

This legislation continued to support ECE reform, promoting a child-oriented, play-driven curriculum and teaching pattern. A new addition to the development of high-quality education was the strategy of using exchange programmes between trend-setting downtown kindergartens and rural ones. This project was based on the cooperation between directors and teachers,^{lix} as well as peer-to-peer research projects. Hence, leading urban preschools, especially demonstration kindergartens, started to play an active role in disseminating their ECE curricula and practical knowledge to improve the management and education level of suburban and rural kindergartens in Shanghai.

In 2010 the Shanghai government had identified four major challenges for ECE. The first was the third peak of natality rates in the municipality since the 1980s, combined with a significant surge in non-Shanghai residents. These two peaks superimposed and contributed to the substantial increase of kindergarten-aged children, putting greater pressure on preschool admission as well as on reaching the 2020 goal of 100% kindergarten enrolment for three years of preschool education (New Challenges).

According to figures from the Shanghai Municipal Family Planning Commission (Table 4.4 below), in 2005 the number of Shanghainese permanent residents was 12,39 million, of which the number of births in Shanghai was 8,25 million, accounting for 66.59% of the permanent population. According to the Planning Commission's estimates for 2013, the number of permanent residents in Shanghai was estimated to reach 16,5 million in 2013, of which 9,2 million were registered, accounting for 55.76% of the city's total population. In 2013, natality rates were predicted to increase by 33.17% compared with 2005, while the

proportion of non-Shanghai residents would rise from 33.41% in 2005 to 44.24%. Following this natality forecast, half a million children were expected to enter the city in 2013, a phenomenon that not only put pressure on kindergarten admissions, but also affected each district and county differently, given the uneven distribution of birth rates. To cope with this increase, the goal was to build 100 new kindergartens by 2013 in both urban, suburban and rural areas, in response to the demographics flow. The document defined this task as an arduous one given its sensitivity to time and budget constraint,^{lx} but the latest STYAP (2019-2021) confirm the great achievements of the local government, like the 99% enrolment rate of Shanghai residents by 2019.

The second challenge targeted the gap between the demand for trained ECE professionals and the actual available qualified personnel. In order to preserve the given 15:1 student-teacher ratio, the document stated that Shanghai needed an additional 8,000 full-time teachers and 3,000 new life skills teachers (*baoyu yuan* 保育员). Hence, the logical answer was to increase the training scale of preschool education students in Shanghai, as well as provide more on-the-job training for new teachers. This deficit of qualified kindergarten teaching staff was recognized by my informants as well, by both kindergarten management and education officials. The trend continued, so even in 2018 it remained difficult for both public and private kindergartens to find qualified teachers. My fieldwork revealed that most university graduates were being employed by top public kindergartens, which left level two and lower-ranked public preschools, as well as private kindergartens, at a great disadvantage in attracting and employing qualified personnel. The analysed data indicates that most private kindergartens hire non-Shanghainese graduates (most without a Shanghai hukou) or teachers who only graduated from an ECE training course, as well as retired Shanghainese teachers (hukou-holders), who had previously worked in good public kindergartens.

Thirdly, there was a deficit in the number of kindergartens compared to the ever-increasing demand, which the government planned on addressing by building 100 kindergartens by 2013, spread throughout the city in response to demographic demands. The fourth challenge was an overarching one, to increase the quantity and improve the quality of ECE.

In its guiding ideology the document partially mirrored its 2006-2008 predecessor in emphasising the importance of following a scientific development concept. The recommended approach defined children as the key to any curriculum and teaching pattern development and focused on the diversified needs of education in order to ensure children's physical and mental health and happy growth (Development Goals and Tasks). This legislation did not mention Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Three Represents, focusing instead on scientific drivers for the continuation of ECE reform.

In line with the 2006 STYAP, the primary responsibility for developing ECE remained with the district and county governments, who were responsible for formulating plans tailored to their respective local needs. Regarding public funding, there were provisions to increase the financial input to 600 million yuan per year. Moreover, an increase of public funding for level three private kindergartens was also stipulated. The most important provision was the commitment to provide 1,200 yuan annually per student to facilitate the enrolment of children from poor families (Main Measures). This provision is additional proof supporting my argument that kindergarten education is defined as a public good in Shanghai.

Overall, the key reform elements were (1) to respect the rules of children's physical and mental development, (2) place games/ play at the centre of curriculum and teaching pattern development, as well as (3) strive to narrow the differences between urban and rural areas in order to improve the overall quality of ECE. These three elements are identical to those mentioned in the 2010 *Guidelines*. The second STYAP was very down-to-earth in defining its ECE goals and assessing the Shanghainese public's demands (hukou-holders): on the one hand,

the document stated that there was a growing demand from the public for diversified and high-quality preschool education, while, on the other, for Shanghai to become a successful and modern international metropolis, quality ECE was a must. Hence, public demand aligned itself with the Centre's vision and was reflected in the official discourse. The challenge undertaken by the government was to improve both the quantity and quality of preschool education.

4.3.3 The third Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan for Preschool Education (2015-2017 STYAP)

At the time of fieldwork, the 2015 STYAP^{lxi} was the overarching legislation shaping ECE realities in Shanghai and was a response to the Ministry of Education's 2014 *Opinions on Implementing the Three-Year Action Plan for the Second Phase of Preschool Education*, as well as to the 'decision-making arrangements' of the 18th National Congress (Preamble). It promoted the implementation of national long-term education goals while being sensitive to local needs. It showed great continuity with its two previous phases by restating the threefold goals for ECE, namely to (1) meet the needs of school-age children, (2) improve the quality of ECE, and (3) respond to the diverse needs of high-quality preschool education. It also targeted the construction of new kindergartens, quality improvement, and building a public service system for preschool education.

This document aligned itself ideologically with the 'spirit' of 18th National Congress, as well as the 2010 Development Plan and State Council Opinions, replicating their language in defining the ECE goals. Thus, the third STYAP encouraged the diversified development of ECE while creating "*an environment conducive to the healthy, orderly and balanced development of preschool education in Shanghai*" (Guiding Ideology), where the needs of children for high-quality education were met by prioritising their health and happiness.

In terms of novel legislation, it included a series of education programmes such as quality teacher training and the supervision and development of level three private kindergarten.^{lxii} SEB Official Huang (EO1) mentioned that one standout was the *Programme for the Evaluation of Education Quality*, which set forth and standardised curriculum goals that all kindergartens had been made aware of by late 2017. According to this informant the evaluation standard was the same for public and private kindergartens to encourage a sense of competition between the two.

Nonetheless, the main challenges the local government was faced with remained unchanged, namely the need to building more preschools and improve the quality of ECE quality, with each district having its specific problems to tackle. Official Bai shared that, to make quality early education accessible to everyone, the MEB had started a project entitled "A good school at your doorstep," which encouraged parents not to be picky in choosing their children's kindergarten or school but aimed at promoting the message that all schools are good and provide quality education (EO2). According to her, to achieve this ideal of fairness and inclusiveness her district was funding 'weak kindergartens' to help make their teaching environment better. Such a project involved pairing kindergartens with universities, the latter helping with the development of level three kindergartens. The purpose of such programmes was to provide an incentive for parents to enrol their children in the kindergarten or school that was closest to their residence.

Regarding the content of the kindergarten curricula, the three education officials I interviewed all agreed that, while Space1.1 kept a close eye on public kindergartens, with an official ECE curriculum available and used in most kindergarten and regular inspections, their private counterparts were still very much unregulated. This lax state of affairs was best captured by official Hei's (EO3) candid comment:

"While we encourage the diversity of kindergarten curricula, there is currently no audit on their content. There must be an audit system, to make sure the used curricula are age-

appropriate and respect national guidelines for ECE. There used to be one, but not anymore. No one has been in charge of it these last few years. There will be some regulations in the future, but I am not yet sure when and what they will entail.”

Her assertion came as a surprise to the researcher, as it seemed to contradict the core aim of the 2010 Education Reform, whose guiding ideology expounded on making sure every stage of education, including preschool, aimed at cultivating patriotic individuals. During my fieldwork the question that arose (and that was later rectified in documents like the 2018 *Annual Kindergarten Party Branch Work Plan* and the 2019-2021 *STYAP*) was how this target was to be achieved when there were no formal kindergarten curriculum guidelines in disseminating core socialist values, as well as traditional Chinese culture. While I could not answer this question at the time of fieldwork, because no such stipulations existed in the three rounds of *STYAPs*, only unofficial 19th National Congress directions to increase values and citizenship education content in both public and private kindergartens, national and local legislation after 2018 changed this legal landscape completely. Consequently, the new 2019-2021 *STYAP*, as well as Party documents targeting early education (Space1.2, addressed in a subsequent section) clearly address the dissemination of moral education as the fundamental task of preschool education. The next part tackles the latest *STYAP* and better frames my analysis of Centre-periphery power relations by bring more evidence to support my argument that Space1 started increasing its control over the diffusion of moral education after the 19th National Congress.

4.3.4 The fourth Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan for Preschool Education (2019-2021 *STYAP*)

The fourth *STYAP* is the local government’s response to the 2018 *Several Opinions on Preschool Education*, the most recent national legislation issued by the Centre to further clarify the direction of ECE development. This action plan aims at building even more kindergartens, improve the quality of care and education (specially through teacher training, scientific parenting guidance and increased publicity), putting an end to the continuing tendency of ‘primary school subject teaching,’ and addressing the contradictions in entering kindergartens.

In 2019 there were 1,627 kindergartens in Shanghai, of which 1,004 public ones (61.7% of the total), the latter enrolling 70% of kindergarten-aged children, which Space1.1 sees as “*having basically established a public service system for preschool education*” (Main Measures). In the next three years the local government plans to further strengthen its responsibilities and create preschool education that is universal, safe, high-quality, diverse and inclusive. By popularising universal benefits it wants to ensure that the eligible permanent population can receive three years of kindergarten education and that most educational services are ‘public welfare inclusive’ (*gongyi puhui* 公益普惠). Its achievements are, for the first time, made easily available to the public through a project entitled “Understanding the 2019-2021 *STYAP* in one picture” (Table 4.5 below).

Another key goal, which I did not encounter in the previous three documents, targets diversity and tolerance. Thus, the Centre has recently become aware of the need to promote a diversified ECE on the basis of providing inclusive preschools that can accommodate different ethnic groups and special needs children, for example, striving to meet the selective needs of all families, not just mainstream Shanghainese residents. However, I could not find an explanation for what prompted this educational shift in this document, nor in other recent local legislation.

To guarantee that ECE becomes a universal benefit accessible to the permanent population, this *STYAP* clarifies specific development goals, like the construction of one kindergarten with 15 classes for every 10,000 residents, and the building or renovation of 90 kindergartens in three years. Moreover, and clashing with the information I acquired from my

local education informants in 2017, namely that Shanghai already had a 99% enrolment rate, this document assesses the enrolment rate of eligible permanent residents to be 97% in 2019 and aims at 99% in 2021. Also, it plans on increasing the proportion of public kindergartens to 65%, while being satisfied with the 85% proportion of children being enrolled in public kindergartens and inclusive private kindergartens (like Private1). The continued investment in developing inclusive kindergartens in new residential communities is flagged as a key issue, Space1.1 being keen on new kindergartens being either public or inclusive private preschools - not for-profit kindergartens, so that all children could enjoy inclusive preschool education.

It is important to note that this legislation purposefully emphasises the local government's achievements in promoting quality and accessible ECE to all permanent residents, the "Understanding the 2019-2021 STYAP in one picture" leaflet (Table 4.5 below) having a clear propagandistic role. With its purposefully childish and colourful appearance, the leaflet leaves out any contentious issues like high entry barriers for most migrant children to enter a public kindergarten and focuses only on positive developments.

The document highlights 'universalisation' and 'inclusiveness' and its guiding ideology, for the first time in a STYAP, only mentions Xi Jinping Thought to promote socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, promising to follow the spirit of the 19th National Congress and promote moral education (*lideshuren* 立德树人). The ideological underpinnings of this legislation support my fieldwork findings from 2017-2018, namely that the *shijiuda* was the turning point for a new ideological direction for ECE, where moral education starts to be used to cultivate patriotic citizens who also uphold the Party's leadership (*jianchi dangde lingdao* 坚持党的领导).

This increased control of the dominant discourse in disseminating its ideological rhetoric is also reflected by the *2018 State Council Opinions* and legislation shaping Space1.2 - local CP branches, like the *2018 Kindergarten Party Branch Plan*. Moreover, in the fourth STYAP, complementing goals like improving training for kindergarten staff and better investment in research and new technologies, Art. 15 specifically tackles the construction of moral teachers, with the goal of putting in place a system "for the ideological and moral verification of new teachers," as the latter are defined as "engineers of the human soul and inheritors of human civilization," (2018 Ten Guidelines, Preamble) whose fundamental task is to cultivate morality by "training socialist builders," (Ibid.) in other words continue to teach the values underpinning Xi Jinping Thought to their young charges. The STYAP thus guarantees the implementation of the *Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers in the New Era (2018)*,^{lxiii} with its goals detailed in Table 4.6 below. Again, goal three, "disseminate outstanding culture by taking the lead in practicing the core socialist values" reinforces my claim that the Centre has taken a recent interest in kindergartens as the first stage of education where the process of allegiance to the Party can begin and that the core socialist values are becoming part of the curriculum, even though they were not formalised as such in the academic year 2017-2018. This legislation has continuity in the *2018 Kindergarten Party Branch Plan*, for example, and the many patriotic activities that kindergarten teachers are encouraged to use by their local CP branch, as well as though the plethora of activity lesson plans available on popular websites like *liuxue86.com*.

4.4 Space1.2: Local Communist Party Branches and their ties with public kindergartens

After looking at the legislative framework ensuring the Centre's control over ECE, especially in the case of public kindergartens, touching upon the ideological guidelines of the key 2010 Education Reform documents and its most recent successor, the *2018 State Council*

Opinions, as well as their local interpretation and implementation via four rounds of STYAPs, this part discusses the ties between kindergartens and Space1.2, namely local Communist Party branches. Predictable within the confines of an authoritarian state, my fieldwork showed that all five kindergartens, be they public or private, have political ties with the Party, from the owners or kindergarten management being CP members to Party cells operating within their walls and kindergarten activities like Pioneer Day seeing CCP officials invited to deliver speeches and preside over military parades. This increasing degree of involvement means that the Centre, working through Space1.2, is being more hands-on in ensuring that future generations of Chinese will not challenge the current political status quo, as forging socialist builders safeguards the CPC's legitimacy.

In the case of the three observed public kindergartens two principals advertised their Party membership on social media and during the celebration of China's National Day, as well as during our interviews. For example, in Public1 demonstration kindergarten Principal Deng's Party affiliation is mentioned on the official website, while Public2's Principal Ling is a Party branch secretary in the district where the kindergarten is situated. I am not sure whether Public3's Principal Lin has a political affiliation, as there was no related information online, nor was I in a position to ask such a sensitive question directly, as I did not want to jeopardise my access to the preschool. Private1 is an inclusive private kindergarten, where the MEB plays a considerable role in defining its operations and curriculum, whose owners used to be public servants and continue to be in the Party. Private2 is owned by a Hong Kong-based group and I could not verify if either management or the owners are associated with the CP.

Moreover, according to my research assistant Eaten (ES4), whose family member works for a local education bureau in Shanghai, all public kindergarten teachers are part of the business Establishment (*shiyè biānzhì* 事业编制), meaning they are not only kindergarten staff members, but also part of the district education bureau staff, who, as public servants, are implicitly affiliated with the CP.^{lxiv} Moreover, even some private kindergartens have at least a member of staff, if not the principal and/or vice-principal themselves, be a Party member, often active in the local party branch (ES4). The relationship between private kindergartens and the Party is discussed at length in Chapter 7. In all five kindergartens at least one member of staff had Party membership and, at least in theory, her duty was to oversee that the kindergarten aligned with Xi Jinping Thought and did not teach and organise any events that resisted the official rhetoric (e.g. PU2K13; PR1K20).

This situation was reinforced by my interview with Prof Zhang (EE7), who explained that every public kindergarten in Shanghai had at least one teacher be active in its local Party branch as part of the Centre's strategy to keep an eye on public kindergartens and make sure its early education discourse targeting values and citizenship education (the cultivation of moral and patriotic individuals) is translated into reality. Moreover, through regular meetings, these teachers are exposed to the same ideological space and are encouraged to use a specific activity calendar (Table 4.7 below) and coordinate patriotic and traditional cultural events in line with proposed lesson plans available on websites like *liuxue86*.

The analysis is supported by a key piece of legislation that actually explains Beijing, and its reaching arm, the local CP branches' strategy for disseminating moral education to the children by ensuring that the teaching staff behaves as what Foucault (1991) defines as 'obedient bodies,' subjects to the Centre's disciplinary power. Hence, the 2018 three-part document entitled *Kindergarten Party Branch Plan*^{lxv} issued by the Party Committee of the district education bureaus aims at publicising the spirit of the 19th National Congress among kindergarten staff, deepen their education in the core socialist values and socialism with Chinese Characteristics and promote a plethora of educational activities under the theme "My Chinese Dream"^{lxvi} (Part1, Art. 5). It is via this Party-run network that nation-wide policies are interpreted and translated into locally implementable legislation. This document aims at

“boldly exploring the construction of Party-building projects” (Preamble), such as the creation of “harmonious kindergarten full of understanding and love, to ensure the stable and healthy development of the children” (Part 3, Art. 3). It is targeting the teaching staff and wants to promote the construction of teachers’ morality by ensuring they are familiar with Deng Xiaoping Thought, the Three Represents and Xi Jinping Thought and also incorporate this socialist ideology into their teaching practices. Of interest was the proposal for April 2019 to organise a “Teacher Ethics Construction Month” (*shide jianshe* 师德建设), targeting the teaching staff by following the logic of institutional penetration, as well as the plethora of patriotic activities sprinkled throughout the year focusing on kindergarten activities like the ones I observed in all five kindergartens, but especially in public preschools (discussed at length in the next chapter).

I posit that the Centre, working via local CP branches, wants this socialist-driven morality the teachers are supposed to follow to ideally trickle down into their teaching patterns and be incorporated both into daily practices and formal lessons, as well as special activities and celebrations, thus influencing the new generations and setting them on their path to becoming upstanding patriotic citizens. Moreover, Party ideology and directives should also have a spill-over effect on the relationship between the kindergarten and society through the teachers-children-parents linkage, accomplished especially through Party-related activities and events. A clear example of this strategy at play is *Little Pioneers Day*, a full-day activity organised by all three public kindergartens in 2018 (but not the two private ones), where all the children, dressed-up as little soldiers, complete with the red scarf emblematic of the Young Pioneers, took part in patriotic activities led by military personnel and marched around the campus. All the parents and grandparents present also participated by singing the national anthem and waving the national flag, with volunteer parents giving small speeches about the importance of loving one’s country and taking pride in being Chinese.

Moreover, the *Moral Education Work Plan for Kindergartens*, published in February 2018, provides general guidelines teachers should follow to strengthen their young charges’ moral education, like “cultivating the children’s love for their collective, hometown and the motherland” (Point 1), by using the national Day to instil patriotism and traditional festivals like the Double Ninth Festival to ensure China’s traditions, like respect for the elderly, are being kept alive.

Space1.2’s control over kindergarten activities is exerted by training teaching staff and encouraging them to use its lesson plans to organise specific activities (which are predominantly patriotic), like the *2018 Moral Education Work Plan for Kindergartens*, as well as by monitoring the kindergartens’ social media posts and collaborating with the SEB and local education bureaus and the information they collect from their annual inspections. Moreover, at least one member of staff has a Party affiliation and is the liaison between their preschool and its local CP branch, thus being responsible for the ideological alignment of that polity.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the Centre’s control over the dissemination of moral education in a kindergarten setting through national and local legislation. To analyse the power relations between the Centre and Spaces2 and 3 I looked at the overarching national legislation of the 2010 Education Reform and its assessment through the 2018 *Opinions on Deepening the Reform*, as well as locally through the implementation of four consecutive STYAPs, both levels shaped by the same guiding ideology glorifying the Party and emphasising the need to “strengthen moral education to cultivate people” (*lideshuren* 立德树人). In other words, all these

documents consistently reflect the same vision of the Centre for the reform of ECE, the ideal of a ‘modern education with Chinese characteristics’ initially based on Deng Xiaoping Thought and The Three Represents, and, more recently, on Xi Jinping Thought.

My analysis of ECE policies was complemented by seven expert interviews and indicated that, after the 19th NCCCCP the Centre, shaped by Xi’s agenda to cultivate patriotic subjects (Kuo 2019; Buckley 2018) has been pressuring kindergartens to have a strong moral education component, as well as limit the promotion of Western cultural content, especially the celebration of Christmas.

I defined the four macro-documents of the 2010 Reform as carriers of the dominant discourse and demonstrated that they prioritised the adherence to moral education as a strategic objective for ensuring the Party’s legitimacy, with the core socialist value system integrated into the whole process of national education. For example, the Development Plan’s Guiding Ideology explicitly stated the need to “*cultivate qualified socialist citizens [by] strengthening the education of ideals and beliefs and moral education,*” as well as by “*strengthening the students’ faith and confidence in the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system.*” Moreover, complementary to a socialist education, Beijing’s vision is to also “*strengthen the education of the Chinese nation’s outstanding cultural traditions and revolutionary traditions*” (Ibid.). The proposed strategy, consistent in future legislation including the 2020 *Law on the Protection of Minors* (e.g. Art. 3), was to “*infiltrate moral education into all aspects of education and teaching*” by permeating every aspect of society, from school education to family education and social education, or, as expressed in its Strategic Objectives, to “*promote the organic integration of moral education.*”

While the focus of this strategy targeted the construction of an interlinked moral education system for primary, secondary and higher education, without the direct mention of preschool education, both my interviews and observation of kindergarten lessons and activities have garnered enough evidence to support my argument that the Centre has been paying a lot more attention to ECE since 2010, as it has realised the importance of this first stage in human development as vital to building patriotic citizens. Hence, I showed that this strategic ideological goal for ECE was developed in subsequent legislation, standing out being the 2018 documents aimed at ensuring that kindergarten teachers promote patriotic values (e.g. *Ten Guidelines for Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers in the New Era; Kindergarten Party Branch Plan*). I looked at this legislation as irrefutable proof of the connection between public kindergartens and local CP branches, with the latter taking an active interest in making sure the teaching staff aligns itself with what the Centre perceives as moral education and teaches their young charges the ‘right’ values.

Moreover, my fieldwork indicated that, at least in Shanghainese public kindergartens, this patriotic discourse shaped by the 12 core socialist values was already integrated in everyday life, as evident in the next chapter, which deals with patriotic activities like the celebration of China’s National Day, as well as the recent spurning of Christmas as an undesirable activity promoting foreign culture. In order to spread awareness about the importance of China’s cultural traditions, as requested by the Centre, all the kindergartens organised special activities and events, the grandest being the week-long Chinese New Year, celebration also analysed in detail in Chapter 5 as a case study for the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

With the goal of providing a more in-depth analysis of the extent of the Centre’s control over ECE in Shanghai I also included seven expert interviews, including three local education officials and two ECE professors. Their opinion validated my argument that preschool education is indeed seen as a public good in Shanghai, but this is not the case nationwide. The reason for this is the special positioning of this municipality, an outcome of the legislation developed and implemented by Space1.1 - the SEB and local education bureaus and their

privileged budget for ECE (see latest ECE achievements in Shanghai in [Table 4.5](#)). Moreover, the favoured condition of ECE in Shanghai, because of its status as a comprehensive education reform experimental zone for China, makes it ‘the best in China’ as it has a qualified teaching staff, good conditions and a teaching pattern that is child driven (e.g. EO1; EE6; Xu and Marsico 2020). As to the 2020 goals of the Education Reform, my interviewees all agreed that Shanghai had already met them before 2017, but only for residents. However, according to the 2019-2021 STYAP, Shanghai had reached only 97% of three-year preschool education enrolment by 2019, aiming for 99% by 2021.

The analysis of the legislation developed by Space1.1 supports the argument that it has the same overarching discourse as the macro-documents of the 2010 Reform, namely the goal of achieving a modern education with ‘Chinese characteristics,’ with the latest round of STYAPs mentioning the need for ‘universalisation’ and ‘inclusiveness,’ as well as reliance on Xi Jinping Thought to promote socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. It promises to follow the spirit of the 19th National Congress and promote moral education by disseminating patriotism and traditional Chinese values. The first three documents were more concerned with developing ECE as a public good and making sure the quality of the curriculum and teaching patterns reflected international standards, as well as increasing the number of both public and private kindergartens, with the latest also tackling an ideological alignment. During my fieldwork in 2017-2018 the local education officials I spoke with saw as the most pressing issues the building of more preschools and improving the quality of ECE at all kindergarten levels, marginalising curriculum content. However, based on my fieldwork I realised that public kindergartens rely on the SEB-approved Thematic Activities teacher’s manual to develop their curriculum, as well as on the 2012 *Curriculum Guidelines*, both promoting moral education. Moreover, their daily schedule is strictly regulated, as the local government wants to make sure children get enough time to play and do exercise. The situation differs in private kindergartens, who retain the freedom to use Western curricula, though they also have to follow the 2012 *Curriculum Guidelines*, with local education bureaus responsible with their supervision.

On the surface, this situation might seem to contradict the ideological goal of the dominant discourse, as shaped by the 2010 Education Reform and reinforced after the 19th National Congress. To understand the extent to which juridical power controls the dissemination of patriotic education in kindergartens, as well as how it engages with disciplinary power at individual level, I had to observe the preschools themselves (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). I was concerned with how Beijing could ensure the building of patriotic citizens when I could not find any official curriculum guidelines stipulating the disseminating of the core socialist values, as well as of traditional Chinese culture, in the STYAPs before 2018, situation redressed after the *shijiuda*. To complement my observation of kindergarten events, as well as interviews with kindergarten management and staff, I also looked for and found other relevant legislative sources. Consequently, I also included a section on Party documents targeting early education, as well as the 19th National Congress.

The connection between kindergartens and the Party was tackled from the perspective of management and teaching staff’s affiliation with the CP. Hence, two of the three public kindergarten principals have membership (one being a local branch secretary), while Private1’s owners are also Party members. Moreover, all public kindergarten teachers are part of the establishment (*bianzhi* 编制), meaning that by being kindergarten staff they are automatically also part of their district education bureau. Hence, because of their status as public servants, they are implicitly affiliated with the CP and have to behave in way that is sanctioned by Beijing. I interpreted this as a purposeful political infiltration of kindergarten spaces, with the goal of ensuring that the Centre’s dominant discourse for the cultivation of patriotic individuals is upheld. This hypothesis is supported by legislation like the 2018 *Kindergarten Party Branch*

Work Plan, which explicitly targets the cultivation of teachers' morality at preschool level, encouraging teachers to incorporate Xi Jinping thought in their lessons in an age-appropriate manner.

Chapter 5: The Centre's Control over the In-Between Space of Public Kindergartens

5.1 Introduction

After providing an in-depth analysis of the key pieces of national and local ECE legislation shaping Shanghainese kindergartens since 2006, driven by the goal of shedding light on how Space1 - the Centre controls the promotion of a patriotic discourse, this chapter focuses exclusively on public kindergarten responses and is grounded in the observation of China's National Day and the Spring Festival during the academic year 2017-2018. Applying the spatial relationship lens defined in the Introduction, I label the three observed public kindergartens as *Space2* or the *Space-in-Between* the homogenising power of the Centre (Space1) and the (relative) freedom of private kindergartens, situated on the Periphery (Space3) (Figure 1.1 above).

In order to assess the Centre's control over the Space-in-Between I operate with the notion of *agency* and deconstruct it into a hierarchical three-tier structure, with the preschool principals as tier one, the teachers as tier two, and the parents as tier three. Hence, I posit that management are the omnipotent actors at the top, while the teaching staff are lacking in agency in relation to the principals and the wishes of the Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) (Space1.1) and the local CCP branches (Space1.2). Also, the parents are devoid of agency within the spatial constraints of the kindergartens and only act according to the principals' wishes.

In terms of Space2's alignment, negotiation and/or resistance to the Centre in terms of curriculum and teaching pattern, the previous chapter discusses at length its conforming responses, a result of their close connection regulated by legislation such as the Shanghai Three-Year Action Plans (STYAPs). In line with local ECE legislation^{lxvii} (e.g. the STYAPs, annual kindergarten work plans and curriculum guidelines issued by the SEB and individual districts) Space1.1 controls the enrolment procedure, ranking and fees, as well as curriculum development and teaching patterns. Hence, all three observed kindergartens mostly use the official curriculum developed by the SEB in accordance with the 2012 *Curriculum Guidelines*, which is published in a series of Learning Activities (*xuexi huodong* 学习活动) teacher manuals by the Shanghai Education Publishing House. Alongside alignment, there is also negotiation, expressed in their 20-30% original component called the 'special curriculum,' where they experiment with global curricula and teaching patterns (provided they have no religious connotation) and promote local culture (PU1K8; PU1K9).

My fieldwork indicates that within Space2 the power resides with the principals, as they are the final authority deciding what is being taught and how, keeping a tight leash on both their teaching staff and the parents (ME5). Thus, my analysis of China's National Day and the Spring Festival targets the kindergartens' dissemination of similar narratives of performing patriotism and traditional Chinese culture for three audiences, namely the regime, the parents and the children, respectively. I observed little variation in the organised activities and content taught in class by the teachers and promoted on the kindergartens' official WeChat accounts. Moreover, the celebration of these two key holidays was unaffected by the 19th National Congress or Xi Jinping's rhetoric on the importance of moral education and nationalising ECE.

One of my informants, Carol, who works for the Shanghai Media Group (SMG) and has been covering ECE in Shanghai for years, captured the principals' omnipotence as follows: "*they are gods, and both the parents and teachers dance to their tune*" (ME5). I found her comment to be a good starting point to look at the connection between kindergarten management and the Party to gauge Space1's control over public kindergartens. Consequently, I carried out interviews with the three kindergarten principals on the dissemination of moral

education (targeting the core socialist values), as well as to understand the impact – if any - the *shijiuda* had on the running of their respective preschool in late 2017 - early 2018. Moreover, as I already explained in the previous chapter, the principals of Public1 and Public2 are CCP members and have made their alignment with socialist ideology clear on both social media and during the interviews, while Public3’s Principal Lin also showed close ties with the local Party branch in the events her kindergarten organised throughout the academic year.

Regarding the relationship between public kindergarten staff and the Centre, I discovered there is a strong link between local CCP branches and teachers, with the Party actively trying to promote moral education (see also the discussion on Space1.2 in Chapter 4) by organising educational activities to cultivate a patriotic teaching staff and encouraging teachers to use Party-generated lesson plans.^{lxviii} As public kindergarten teachers are automatically part of their district education bureau and at least one member of staff has a Party affiliation, the 2018 *Kindergarten Party Branch Work Plan* and the *Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct for Kindergarten Teachers* are actively advocating for building patriotic teachers (e.g. Tables 4.6 and 4.7 below). To reach a deeper understanding of this phenomenon I also interviewed six senior (five-to-six year-olds) class (K2) teachers, two from each observed preschool, regarding their views on moral education and the 19th NCCPC.

Another actor I added to this equation was the parents of the K2 classes I observed (one class per kindergarten), whose opinion was garnered using parent questionnaires. Public2 kindergarten, which I assess as the closest to upholding the patriotic discourse proposed by the Centre, is the only one who denied my request for distributing parent questionnaires, so I only collected two rounds of questionnaires in Public1, an elite demonstration kindergarten, and Public3, the latter affiliated with a leading local university. The data analysis revealed that public kindergarten parents are devoid of agency within Space2, but that they are also not interested in exerting any authority over what their children are learning. The explanation lies in the highly competitive Shanghainese education (EO1; EE6), where the entry requirements for these elite preschools are very strict and the demand greatly exceeds the availability.^{lxix} More often than not, *guanxi* is vital in securing a place, parents giving up their agency in favour of “*staying on the principal’s good side*” (ME5), happy to have secured a privileged education for their offspring. Even public officials like Ms. Bai (EO2), who argued in favour of closer ties between kindergarten and parents and more parental involvement, recognised this is a trade-off the parents are aware of and more than willing to make.

The fourth actor is the senior class children, aged between five and six, who are subjected to a plurality of discourses – from their teachers and parents, in the case of this analysis, and who act as both subjects and, to a smaller degree, agents. I will only marginally discuss their interactions with patriotic and traditional Chinese cultural narratives by looking at how they celebrated China’s National Day and the Spring Festival. For the latter event I observed related activities in each of the three kindergartens and include vignettes of classroom conversations, conveying a simplistic analysis of their imitation, negotiation, and resistance to these forces. The reasons why I do not go more in depth are the length constraints of this thesis, and my aim of answering my research question by including what I deem to be all the key actors.

The following sections capture what I consider to be the most significant instances of the Centre’s control over public kindergartens, looking at (1) enrolment, ranking and fees, (2) Space2’s behaviour in response to the 19th NCCPC, especially the (3) dissemination of the 12 socialist values through kindergarten curricula, and the case studies of (4) performing patriotism through China’s National Day and (5) performing traditional Chinese culture through the Spring Festival.

5.2 Enrolment, ranking and fees as expressions of the Centre’s control

To capture the power relations between elite public kindergartens in Shanghai and the Centre, I start by looking at how Space1 exercises control over their ranking, enrolment requirements and tuition fees, thus relegating them to the position of the Space-in-Between its homogenising power and the relative freedom and heterogeneity of the Periphery. The regime is using “meritocracy, hierarchy, and regimentation” (Vickers 2021: 61-61) as key tools of control over the entirety of Chinese society, with kindergartens being no exception, as accruing ‘numeric capital’ (Woronov 2016) starts in preschool.

These aspects are clearly regulated by the legislation passed by the Shanghai and local education bureaus and limit public kindergartens’ potential for agency. I posit that the good reputation they pride themselves on, both locally and nationally, as well as the financial privileges derived from their ranking are dependent on their ideological alignment with the dominant discourse, which materialises in their usage of the official curriculum (the Learning Activities manuals published by the Shanghai Education Publishing House) and the promotion of patriotic and traditional activities on their social media.

All three public kindergartens chosen for observation are ranked by the SEB as level one class one (*yiji yilei* 一级一类), which means they are some of the best in Shanghai. Moreover, they are all located in central districts and have been operating for at least two decades, their prime location and longstanding history being clear indicators of their good reputation both in the local psyche as well as nation-wide. Combined with their selective enrolment requirements, it is evident to the researcher that they cater to the Shanghainese elite. Because they are public, they are mostly funded by the national and local governments, the highest-level kindergartens attracting the most funds and having very affordable fees, especially compared to their private counterparts.

According to official Huang (EO1), in 2017 level one kindergartens charged 300-400 RMB/ month in tuition fees, while good private kindergartens could go as high as 15000 RMB/ month. The most expensive public kindergartens are the demonstration kindergartens, charging 700 RMB/month. Level three kindergartens asked for about 200 RMB/month. MEB official Bai (EO2) also confirmed the tuition fees, saying that the monthly amount for a level three public kindergartens was 175 yuan per month and 350 yuan for a level one institution (Figure 5.1 below).

Figure 5.1 Public kindergarten tuition fees in Shanghai in RMB/month (2017-18)



Source: Data collected from interviews with education officials Huang (EO1) and Bai (EO2), 2017-2018

Figure 5. 1 Public kindergarten tuition fees

In addition, level one class one kindergartens have the best facilities among all public kindergartens, excellent conditions that, from my observations, are not often surpassed by good private kindergartens. In terms of teaching staff, they have the most qualified teachers among both types of kindergartens, the majority being native Shanghainese and early education graduates from top local universities (EO3). Their enrolment process is very selective and only parents who own property in the vicinity of the kindergarten, as well as hold a Shanghai residence permit, also called a *hukou* (户口) are eligible (ME5). Moreover, in the case of Public3, as it is affiliated with a famous local university, only staff members and residents from the three nearest housing estates are eligible (PU3K16). These restrictive entrance requirements severely limit access to top public kindergartens to the socio-economic elite, reality validated by my fieldwork experience, as my informants often mentioned the importance of having connections, or *guanxi* (关系) in order to gain access to these three kindergartens.

Consequently, as derived from the parent questionnaire analysis, many subjects who gained access to elite public kindergartens exhibited political correctness (despite the survey being anonymous^{lxx}) by supporting the Party's ideological discourse and shunning or only superficially celebrating non-Chinese cultural activities at home. This mentality is perfectly captured by a Public1 parent as an answer to a Christmas-related question: “*we do not celebrate Christmas, as it is a foreign holiday and we are Chinese, so we only celebrate Chinese festivals*” (PUB1_QUEST1_5/28). Moreover, this attitude of encouraging the dissemination of patriotic and traditional Chinese values was reinforced by the majority as, when asked what it meant to be Chinese to them, they emphasized feelings of pride. Under a Foucauldian lens, this behaviour could be that of obedient bodies (1991): because the Centre controls entrance to these coveted kindergartens, the privileged few who get past this gatekeeper must also accept to be shaped by Beijing's values-driven discourse encouraging the cultivation of patriotic citizens and self-regulated their actions accordingly. Another explanation is that these parents are part of the local socio-economic elite and have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo they are benefiting from.

As I show in Chapter 6, “Anti-discourses,” the parents only retain their capacity for agency outside the spatiality of the kindergarten by enrolling their children in extracurricular classes where they are exposed to ‘Western; culture (mostly through the learning of English). On the other hand, this behaviour of parents following the Party script within Space2 because top public kindergartens are the most likely to lead to a good primary school could be the expression of pragmatic actors, who say what is needed in public and act according to their convictions in private – by choosing to enrol their children in a plethora of extracurriculars like an English training centre, piano lessons, chess, or football, all global trends, they subject their offspring to diverse learning environments outside the confinements of public kindergarten SEB-approved curricula.

Regarding the kindergarten ranking system in Shanghai, SEB official Huang (EO1) stated that the local government is planning to relax it because it is “*an unnecessary administrative burden,*” pressuring the Space1.1 to regularly assess the municipality's kindergartens to assess their ranking and see if they meet with different funding requirements. Not only is this a waste of the education officials' time (EO1), but these rankings create fierce competition among parents, many of whom are obsessed with enrolling their children in ‘the best’ kindergartens, which they equate with the highest ranked, while level three kindergartens are generally avoided, mentality that official Bai (EO2) sees as counter conducive to Space1.1's aim for inclusiveness. By rendering the ranking system obsolete in the foreseeable future, the SEB and local education bureaus will, at least on paper, fulfil the Centre's requirement for a homogenised, quality ECE, in line with the socialist ideology of equal access to education.

In practice, however, I do not see how this is going to happen any time soon, as ‘ranking’ and ‘hierarchy’ are greatly valued in contemporary China, where one’s mark in the *zhongkao* (中考) and *gaokao* (高考) exams is key in deciding that individual’s future. Thus, in the words of Woronov, China is shaped by an “*ideology of numeric capital [...] where a number comes to stand in for a person*” (2016:14), and ECE has been co-opted into this logic of numeric capital. Space1.1 is not blind to this status quo so, in its quest for a more ‘public welfare inclusive’ (*gongyi puhui* 公益普惠) ECE, as expressed in the 2019-2021 STYAP, it is planning to abolish the ranking system to ease the pressure placed on the local government and the ordinary Chinese. At the time of my fieldwork official Bai (EO2) spoke of this initiative, but it was only hinted at in the 2015-2017 STYAP in its immediate goals, the standardization of quality education and facilities in public kindergartens so every neighbourhood kindergarten would become a ‘good kindergarten.’ For MEB official Hei (EO3), the result of having quality ECE throughout the city, regardless of district or neighbourhood, is two-fold: first, taking the pressure off parents to find a ‘better’ kindergarten and change house for their children; second, making it easier for kindergartens to select applicants, as current top kindergartens will hopefully receive significantly less requests. The goal is thus to create “*the best education for everyone*” (EO1), an inclusive “*public service system for preschool education*” (2019 STYAP, Main Measures), especially since everyone will be using the same core curriculum and teaching patterns to cultivate socialist builders.

As to the role tuition fees play in the power relations between the Centre and public kindergartens, they are regulated by the local government based on their ranking and have remained mostly unchanged for the past 20 years (EO2). Their affordability is a clear sign of the regime’s control, as they are clearly not operating to make a profit, as opposed to their private counterparts. Moreover, Space1.1 provides a subsidy for every enrolled child, depending on the type and ranking of their respective kindergarten. In line with the official discourse, as expressed by MEB official Bai (EO2), demonstration kindergartens will get the most money, as they have a higher quality of education and have ongoing early education pilot programmes. All the tuition fees received by public kindergartens are collected by the local government, hence, from the Centre’s point of view, individual kindergarten fees do not matter, as they end up in the same budget (ES4).

To shed light on what drove parents to choose a public kindergarten, I included this open-ended question in the first round of parent questionnaires distributed in Public1 and Public3 kindergarten (November 2017). In the case of Public1, the *tuition fees* argument was mentioned only three times, as a ‘cost effective’ choice, while *facilities* appeared 10 times, including ‘safe environment/safety.’ Only in Public3 did the argument of proximity come up, and it was the most important reason, 10 out of the 37 respondents mentioning it (27% incidence).

Based on the parents’ responses, three themes were identified, namely the kindergarten’s (1) good reputation, (2) curriculum, and its (3) teaching staff and teaching pattern. Under the ‘good reputation’ theme I grouped the reasons: official kindergarten ranking, word-of-mouth (recommendation from family and friends), quality education, and long history. The most common reasons provided were curriculum and teaching method quality, from which the focus on ‘quality’ (*suzhi* 素质) was obvious. A potential explanation for the informants’ insistence on *suzhi* could be that the dominant discourse’s propaganda of constructing Chinese education as quality driven (nationwide since the 2010 Reform, and for Shanghai since the first STYAP, in 2006) was successful in convincing its subjects that this is the case, at least in level one kindergartens. For the curriculum, the parents listed the reasons: ‘quality education’, ‘a standardised curriculum’ (approved by the SEB and using the Learning Activity manuals), ‘happy education,’ and the promotion of a ‘Chinese cultural heritage.’ These reasons indicate that the parents trust the official discourse on ECE fully.

Related to this category is the follow-up values question - *What values do you think your child is learning in this public kindergarten?* - which brought additional insight into the parents' way of thinking. As follows, both Public1 and Public3 parents believe that their chosen kindergarten disseminates good learning habits, respect, cooperation, and autonomy, provides a happy environment that promotes friendship, and teaches their children to be "*little citizens of the world with a Chinese heart*" (PUB1_QUEST1_9/28). The dissemination of traditional Chinese culture was mentioned 5 times (out of 28 respondents) in Public1, and only once in Public3 (out of 37 respondents).

My analysis of the parents' responses suggests that these subjects do not feel the need to involve themselves in what and how their children are being taught, trusting wholeheartedly in the reputation of their chosen kindergarten and, by association, in the official discourse. They are not agents of change, but supporters of whatever Beijing, speaking through their respective public kindergarten, decides their children should learn. They exhibit political correctness in officially supporting the educational status quo, their only outlet for agency being the extracurricular lessons and activities they enrol their children in, choices discussed at length in the next chapter, where I tackle resistance towards the dominant discourse. Because public kindergartens follow the requirements of the SEB and local education bureaus, using the sanctioned curriculum and focusing on the promotion of patriotic sentiments and traditional culture, the parents passively align themselves with this rhetoric by not voicing any demands to the kindergartens' management.

Consequently, I discovered that, at least in the eyes of the parents, public kindergartens are not spaces of resistance where the ordinary Chinese can engage with educational content and advocate for a more global context, be it the teaching of a foreign language or the celebration of a Western festival. On the contrary, the picture contoured by one year of fieldwork, supported by my interview with Prof. Zhang (EE7) and media expert Carol (ME5) shows that the parents are so grateful to have secured a spot for their offspring in a top public kindergarten – their best shot at a good public primary school - that they are very accommodating to whatever kindergarten management and classroom teachers ask of them. Their position is that of conformity with the dominant discourse.

According to official rhetoric, the Centre, working through its local education bureaus, has the well-being of the ordinary Chinese at heart and is doing its best to provide them with quality, but affordable, ECE. The researcher looks at this strategy as a very intelligent and efficient way for Space1 to maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of resident Shanghainese, as few parents could refuse cheap but well-equipped kindergartens and qualified staff teaching according to a child-focused teaching pattern, even with a patriotic curriculum disseminating allegiance to the Party. The best public kindergartens, however, remain level one kindergartens like the ones I observed, where entry is still only possible for the most privileged segments of Shanghai hukou-holders, who also have the *quanxi* needed to access them.

In the next part I discuss the second instance of Space1's control, namely Space2 performing patriotism through the promotion, on social media, of a picture of a socialist teaching staff conscientiously watching the 19th National Congress. Through interviews and observation I assess the potential consequences of this event on the *Space-in-Between* during the academic year 2017-2018. While this flow of ideas from tuitions fees to behaviour responses to the *shijiuda* might initially seem disjointed, what I did in part one was to contextualise the situation of public kindergartens by explaining the legislation shaping Space2 and the parents' responses, while in the section below I search for potential changes appearing in their curricula and especially in their social media posts because of a turning point for ECE, the October 2017 NCCPC. The legal changes this key political event had on both public and private kindergartens are tackled in the previous chapter, where I addressed the 2019-2021 *STYAP*, as well as the new logic of institutional penetration by Xi Jinping Thought via

documents like the 2018 *Kindergarten Party Branch Plan* and the *Moral Education Work Plan for the Senior Class for the New Semester*.

5.3 Space2's behaviour in response to the 19th NCCPC

Given that I started my fieldwork in October 2017, a time of key political change embodied in the assembly of the 19th National Congress, I wanted to make full use of the opportunity and determine whether the event influenced the curricula and activities of three observed public kindergartens, specifically if they were required to increase their patriotic and traditional Chinese culture content and limit the presence of Western festivals (particularly Christmas). In my subsequent chats and interviews with kindergarten management and teaching staff I decided on a direct approach and asked them this question verbatim, also arranging it so it followed one targeting the 12 core socialist values and their influence in shaping curriculum and teaching patterns. The motive behind this question order was to guide the respondents towards linking the *shijiuda* with the discourse on socialist values and patriotism, but without overtly connecting it with the 12 core socialist values.

In total, I interviewed 11 people and will focus on their noteworthy behaviour and responses. The most politically correct and at times vague answers were provided by the Public2 staff, which I assess as having the closest ties with the CCP based on Principal Ling's Party membership, the kindergarten's high number of patriotic activities promoted in the local media, as well as the patriotic language used on its official WeChat account. Teacher Xiao, the head teacher of the K2 class I observed throughout the year, did not stray from the path of political correctness throughout the entire interview, often quoting from local ECE legislation and the official rhetoric. When I asked whether the 19th National Congress had impacted her kindergarten in any way, her patriotic reply was that she conscientiously followed the event on TV and that *"it is important to watch the news carefully, as the shijiuda will impact kindergarten education, too. We should focus on current events in China, and [...] we should feel that our country is developing constantly"* (PU2K14).

This narrative of loyalty to the Party was reinforced during an informal chat with her younger co-teacher, Teacher Mei (PU2K15), even though the latter was more candid and even went by an English name in our interactions. She also built the image of a patriotic teaching staff that consistently and fervently followed the directives of the Centre-Beijing, referring at length to the kindergarten's social media presence:

"As you can see from our WeChat posts, we had many teacher meetings to watch Chairman Xi on TV and took a lot of notes during the shijiuda. We also took many pictures and posted them. We will use what Chairman Xi said in developing our curriculum" (PU2K15).

Hence, during the one-week NCCPC in October 2017, all Public2 teachers watched and discussed related news, especially Xi's speech, and posted related pictures and content on the kindergarten's official WeChat account. While documents like the 2018 *Kindergarten Party Branch Work Plan* show that the Party's agenda is to cultivate a strong socialist morality among the teaching staff, my informal chats with the younger teachers held towards the end of the fieldwork, where we had established a closer relationship, indicate that this Party-driven patriotic zeal is a superficial phenomenon, patriotic rituals like watching the 19th National Congress and posting extensively about it being, in reality, a performative act of political correctness. This assessment is best captured by Teacher Mei, who confided that *"we do these things because the principal asks us to, but we don't really take them to heart. I could not recite the 12 core socialist values, myself, actually"* (PU2K14).

In Public1 kindergarten, a demonstration kindergarten with both an international and local stream, I again posed the question directly to both Teachers Wu and Shan, the head

teachers of the observed senior class. To make both of them more comfortable in answering, I framed the question within the context of my hearing of other public and private kindergartens being asked by their local education bureaus to include more Chinese culture in their lessons, especially in the English-Mandarin bilingual streams, and not focus too much on Western holidays, especially Christmas. My framing strategy was designed to soften the question in a country where many citizens are wary of answering politically sensitive questions and where they tend to mirror the expected, Party-approved answers when asked in an official capacity, even when their anonymity is guaranteed.

Both said that the *shijiuda* had not affected Public1 in any significant way (PU1K10, PU1K11), assessment confirmed by my interview with Teacher Yun (PU1K9), the K2 age-group representative for their international stream, who explained that the Centre's aforementioned strategy was actually a '*balance of cultures*' approach and the SEB had already informed them to not disseminate any religious content a few years prior to October 2017. Teacher Wu (PU1K10) was keen to point out that their local stream was fully committed to promoting Chinese culture, especially through the celebration of Chinese traditional festivals, as well as by teaching the 24 solar terms. According to her, even their international classes do not only teach Western culture exclusively, but international culture, with a hefty dose of local culture and traditional Chinese festivals (Ibid.). She used the example of their *Culture Week*, where children learnt about different countries, to make a point that neither stream fully focuses on the dissemination of Western culture but has an international scope instead. Teacher Shan went on to emphasize that their teaching pattern frames different cultures by comparing them with China, with the "*goal of promoting tolerance and acceptance by making the children familiar with diversity*" (PU1K11). Accordingly, the local stream children are taught to be proud of their country's history by "*having national self-confidence, loving the motherland, and having a sense of belonging, but without being arrogant toward other cultures*" (Ibid.).

In Public3, which I assess as the least under the Centre's control regarding the cultivation of patriotic individuals, Principal Lin (PU3K16) shared that the 19th NCCPC was going to have an impact on the entirety of social and political life in China, especially by emphasising the importance of preschool education and the development of quality ECE teaching staff. However, she mentioned that it was not going to change anything in her kindergarten, as she felt it was already aligned with the official discourse for promoting China's traditional culture, as well as that of China as an 'ecological civilisation.' In her words, "*We began to build a green and scholarly kindergarten promoting Confucian thought two years ago (in 2015), which fits the spirit of 'green China' advocated in the reports of the 19th NCCPC, as well as reflects the spirit of 'inheriting Chinese traditional culture.'* We want to make our kindergarten into a home for both our children and parents, a place where the local community can come together and share in our country's beautiful culture, while also protecting the environment" (PU3K16).

In line with Hansen et al. (2018), the regime's response to China's environmental degradation is the narrative of 'ecological civilisation' (*shengtai wenming* 生态文明), with the Sino-centric goal of forging a sense of national continuity with China at the centre of global environmental efforts. This discourse is promoting a vision of a "*Communist Party-led utopia*" (Hansen et al. 2018:195) shaped by a cohesive eco-civilisation rooted in the Centre's construction of national identity. I noticed that Public1 kindergarten's curriculum and teaching patterns disseminated this imaginary to young children, a '*socialist ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics for a new era,*' which Hansen critiques as actually being a selective and reductionist interpretation of ancient philosophical traditions.

Connecting this with her opinion on the moral education discourse promoted by Beijing, Principal Lin (PU3K16) advocated that it is important for people to love their country, as patriotism is a key component of one's identity. Moreover, she explained that while Space1 is

using ECE as an instrument for cultivating patriotism, teachers continue to have plenty of freedom in deciding how to disseminate moral education because, as Chinese citizens, they believe in the Party but have the right to have an original contribution as well (Ibid.). Interestingly enough, and again as an expression of political correctness, she presupposed that all teachers ascribe to this collective identity and support the China Dream:

“People who do not love their own country don’t accept themselves. You can analyze the big impact of the 19th National Congress by comparing it to our teaching methods. When we teach children, we don’t go too far in setting out rules. The more rules we give them, the less likely they are to follow them. My own understanding is this: the leaders of this country said just one sentence, realise the China Dream. The person who follows it will understand it in her own way, she will do it according to her understanding, but it will be the right way, as we are all patriots at heart. Education in China is subject to political constraints as education can also promote a political agenda, but we can judge for ourselves how to realise our China Dream. Hence, I think education should also have a degree of autonomy” (PU3K16).

Teacher Wen (PU3K17) of Public3, in my interview at the beginning of January 2018, mentioned that after the 19th NCCPC her kindergarten circulated an official document which mentioned that the goal of kindergartens was to promote Chinese culture, thus asking them to put more emphasis on celebrating Chinese festivals, which I corroborated to be the *Moral Education Work Plan for the Senior Class for the New Semester*.

Overall, all three public kindergartens extensively covered the 19th National Congress in official WeChat posts and were keen to construct a public image of enthusiastic patriotism, where socialist and traditional Chinese values are upheld by the staff, the children and the parents. While they did not mention any specific changes regarding an increase in patriotic content in their curricula because of the *shijiuda*, my interview with Principal Lin (PU3K16) revealed that her kindergarten had been asked by local authorities to not disseminate religious content or promote holidays like Christmas and feature traditional culture instead. Moreover, public teachers were using the *Moral Education Work Plan for the Senior Class for the New Semester* to design their lesson plans starting with 2018.

5.4 The 12 core socialist values in public kindergarten curricula

While the 12 core socialist values are being strongly promoted in compulsory education since the 2010 Education Reform, all public schools having a morality or citizenship education subject (道德 *dàodé*) where the students learn them by heart, kindergartens do not teach these values in the same way, according to both the interviews with education officials and teachers, as well as my own observations. However, their spirit permeated kindergarten life in all three observed preschools, integrated in topics like ‘I love my country’ and ‘I am Chinese,’ as well as in the constant promotion of traditional Chinese culture and patriotic activities.

After ascertaining the 12 values were not taught in a separate Morality subject, as in later stages of education, I changed my line of inquiry to discover what topics related to the dissemination of socialist values to cultivate patriotic citizens are being taught instead, as well as related activities. In Public2, the kindergarten most influenced by Party ideology, especially because of its management’s connections with the Communist Party, Teacher Xiao clarified: *“We don’t have specific classes for the core socialist values, we just integrate them into daily activities. They are all good principles, such as loving our country, quality education, being nice to friends, being grateful for everything the Party is doing for us. As a teacher, I also attended activities where I learnt more about how to teach the 12 values, but I also do this by myself, online, so I can then teach them properly to the children”* (PU2K14).

Her co-teacher, Teacher Mei (PU2K15), confirmed that, while the 12 socialist values were not used directly in the Public2 curriculum, she and other teachers had to attend special classes on morality and patriotism hosted by the kindergarten but given by a representative from the local CP branch. This example showcases how Space1.2 directly influences public kindergartens and how legislation like the *Kindergarten Party Branch Plan (2018)* targets the cultivation of moral teachers who are loyal to the Party and help disseminate moral education to their young charges. However, according to her, there were no visible changes to the curriculum in 2017-2018, the children having the usual patriotism (*aiguo* 爱国) lessons suggested in the SEB-approved Learning Activities teacher manual.

It is important to note that, on its official website, where Public2 kindergarten's achievements and distinctions are listed, awards that are connected to the CP abound, like the District May Fourth Red Flag Organization or the District Special New Long March Commando Team awards. Linked to its principal, Mrs. Lin, being a Party branch secretary and in line with my observations of staff meetings and official WeChat posts during the 19th National Congress, Public2 is a privileged space for the analysis of Party ideology shaping a public kindergarten, where the curriculum and teaching pattern perfectly mirror the official discourse in terms of patriotic propaganda dissemination. Moreover, in all my interactions with this kindergarten's staff everyone was very careful to project the image of a patriotic kindergarten where things are done according to the Centre's rhetoric. The one exception was Teacher Mei's (PU2K12) candid confession that these are superficial actions performed not out of true conviction, but because of political correctness, namely that this is what Beijing, working through the SEB, expects from a top public kindergarten, especially since the latter wishes to increase its ranking to that of a demonstration kindergarten.

In Public1 kindergarten, management reflected the official views of Public2 and Public3, arguing the following:

"We don't teach the children the 12 core socialist values in detail, but we do teach them the meaning behind them in our curriculum. [...] We use both Chinese and Western stories, books and songs, and during the entire day the children's behaviour is shaped into that of a good person. While we don't ask the children to recite the 12 core values, the entire staff working in this kindergarten knows them and can recite them easily" (PU1K9).

Accordingly, the interviewees in all three preschools were keen to emphasize that, while the values are not taught per se, they are integrated within the curriculum and that the teachers know them by heart. Public1's Teacher Yun (PU1K9) also clarified that, as a public kindergarten teacher, one has the responsibility to know the 12 values, as well as follow the 19th NCCPC closely, and take part in local Party-led meetings and patriotic training.

In response to my direct question whether they use the 12 core socialist values in their lessons, Teacher Wu said that these values are integrated into the entirety of Chinese society, especially in education, and that *"they have been greatly promoted in our kindergarten, but only those the children can understand, such as patriotism, harmony, and friendship"* (PU1K10). While no special lesson on values and citizenship education existed in any of the observed kindergartens, in Public1 they shaped the curriculum as to incorporate their spirit: *"our main educational goal is to nurture international citizens with Chinese hearts. Having a Chinese heart is connected to loving our country through these 12 core values, so the curriculum is inspired by them"* (PU1K10). Her partner, Teacher Shan (PU1K11), went a step further to emphasize that these principles were integrated into the kindergarten's daily practices and had become an essential part of the children's routine. According to her, *"If the teachers have the correct values, then the values they give their pupils are also correct. The children do not need to memorise these 12 core values and recite them, that is not our goal. We teach them through various age-appropriate activities, which make it easier for young children to understand, internalise and use these values in their daily life"* (Ibid.).

Moreover, Teacher Wu mentioned that being a teacher's helper for the day, called a 'little volunteer,' or learning about the topic 'I am Chinese' are great examples of these values being put into practice, as they are designed around instilling a sense of belonging and love for one's friends, teachers, and the motherland (PU1K10). However, regarding the teaching staff receiving training on the 12 core values, especially on how to integrate them into the curriculum and age-appropriate daily activities, Teacher Wu denied receiving any such training.

Regarding the presence of the core socialist values in its curriculum, an interview with Public2's Teacher Xiao (PU2K14) clarified that they are integrated into their unique *Life Education Curriculum*, permeating both daily activities and special celebrations. At the same time, the kindergarten has traditional Chinese classes, like calligraphy and playing the *pipa* and *guzheng*, but they don't have any textbooks for them. This original curriculum, making up about 20% of the content (the rest being based on the Thematic Activities teacher's manual) is focused on promoting local values and culture and was entirely developed by the Public2 teachers (PU2K12).

Public3's Principal Lin (PU3K16) also mentioned that the core values were part of the curriculum, like pre-K children learning about how to use democracy, equality and harmony at home and in society through the theme 'I love my family.' The K1 classes have the topic 'There are people all around us,' where they learn how to behave properly towards teachers, their elders, and people in the community at large. The senior classes are taught about patriotism through the topic 'I am Chinese,' where the focus is on nurturing their love for their hometown and the motherland. Principal Lin was the only person I interviewed who showed a firm grasp of the core values, listing them all and explaining how they played a role in the Public3 curriculum and lesson plans:

"In the 12 core socialist values, prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony are the national values, while freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law are social values. Patriotism, dedication, honesty, and friendship are the values of citizens, at the individual level. In this kindergarten many of our lessons refer to democracy, civility, harmony, equality, justice, patriotism, integrity, and friendship, values that are closer to the children's experience and easy for them to understand if they are explained in a simple manner" (Ibid.).

Her opinion was mirrored by Teacher LinLin, who explained that she understands the development of modern China as the result of *"adopting and adapting outstanding ideas from foreign countries and mixing it with our inherited the traditional culture"* (PU3K18). To her, *"Chinese children need to know that they are Chinese. Chinese people attach great importance to affection and 'family' is in their blood. We don't deliberately demand the 12 values to be memorised. It's about cultivating a sense of identity in every activity, like Chinese festivals and traditions. We do this because we want children to improve their lives and build a beautiful China"* (Ibid.).

The thematic analysis of my interviews with Space2 principals and teaching staff provides a vivid picture of the way the core socialist values are integrated into their curricula and activities, as well as their ideological alignment with the dominant discourse. Moreover, both local education bureaus (Space1.1) and local CP branches (Space1.2) are taking an active role in promoting moral education via patriotic activities and by cultivating moral teachers. Wanting to understand whether the answers I highlighted above were only a performative act, an expression of political correctness, I also looked at each kindergarten's monthly topics and lesson plans, noticing that they are all following the SEB-approved Learning Activities teacher manual, as well as online lesson plans from Party-approved websites (like *liuxue86*). Moreover, during my observations spanning over the 2017-2018 academic year I observed many activities grounded in the 12 core socialist values, with patriotic activities like China's National Day and the promotion of traditional culture analysed in two separate sections below.

5.5 Space2's performative patriotism and traditional Chinese culture

Wanting to acquire a better understanding of how values and citizenship education is disseminated through kindergarten activities, I analysed what I consider to be its two key manifestations, namely China's National Day for performative patriotism, and the Spring Festival, including the Lantern Festival, as the celebration par excellence encapsulating Chinese traditions. The analysis of these two events is complemented by data on related patriotic and cultural activities carried out by the three kindergartens throughout the academic year 2017-2018, even though length constraints led to a careful selection of the examples I included. The intersecting narratives I am constructing below rely on a multitude of data sources, from direct observation, staff interviews and parent questionnaires to an analysis of lesson plans and the kindergarten's social media posts.

The activities were highly mediatised and served a dual performative function: one audience was the parents (and, by extension, the local community), while the other was Space1, each kindergarten doing its best to show off its environment and the quality of its education, as well as its ideological alignment with the Centre. I discuss these patriotic and traditional celebrations in separate sections by comparing the related events put together by each kindergarten, noting little variation in the activities and language used, as well as no changes from previous years (no increase in the scale of the activities as a response to the *shijiuda*).

5.5.1 Performing patriotism: Narratives of China's National Day

As I did not gain access to the observed kindergartens nor had the required ethics approval prior to the end of September 2017, when China's National Day was celebrated (before the week-long holiday called the National Day Golden Week), the analysis for performing patriotism is based on the kindergartens' official WeChat posts and interviews with management and teachers, as well as a parent questionnaire collected in Public1 and Public3 kindergartens in November 2017. I argue that the 19th National Congress did not influence Space2 to include more patriotic content in its celebration, as this holiday is traditionally mediatised and all three public kindergartens go to great lengths to organise an outstanding event each year. However, according to media expert Carol (ME4), whose team of journalists reported on national day-related events at various kindergarten and schools throughout the city, the local government encouraged all educational institutions to prepare a grand-scale celebration because of the *shijiuda*.

Regarding the curriculum, in all three kindergartens the monthly topic for September was 'patriotism' (*aiguo* 爱国), in accordance with the Learning Activities teachers' manual, which all public kindergartens use as 70-80% of their curricular content.^{lxxi} As September, the first month of the academic year, hosted two of the most important annual celebrations in China, the Mid-Autumn Festival and China's National Day, it gave the observed kindergartens the perfect opportunity to blend patriotic activities with traditional Chinese culture. Because the monthly topic focuses on the dissemination of patriotism, culminating with the celebration of China's National Day, all three kindergartens had the same core activities.

Of note were the lessons on China's history, starting with the founding of the PRC in 1949, where Mao Zedong was affectionately referred to as 'grandpa Mao' (*Mao yeye* 毛爷爷) in Public2, and the country's geography and diverse ethnic groups, all three kindergartens having a big map on their Teaching Boards. These lessons were complemented by patriotic rituals like the raising of the flag ceremony and children marching in military uniform, as well as several activities targeting Shanghai's local culture and landmarks, where especially Party-related sites were visited. However, I did not see any portraits of Mao Zedong or Xi Jinping in

any of the five observed preschools, be they public or private. In Public1 kindergarten, for example, all senior class children went on a trip to visit the site of the First National Congress, which is preserved as a museum in Xintiandi, Teacher Wu (PU1K10) taking the opportunity to tell them about the upcoming 19th session. From looking at the lesson plans and WeChat posts, I noticed that the two foci of interest in the curricula were China and Shanghai, the national narrative of patriotism mixing with the local narrative of being proud to live in Shanghai.

5.5.1.1 Public1 Kindergarten: A global citizen with a Chinese heart

“The National Day is the birthday of our great motherland. Sixty-nine years ago, on October 1, 1949, Chairman Mao climbed the Tian’an Men Gate Tower in Beijing to announce the founding of New China, the People’s Republic of China, to the people of the whole country and to the whole world. The Chinese nation has stood up ever since. Later, the government decided to celebrate the birth of the great motherland on October 1st every year as the National Day. What a meaningful holiday!” (Public1 Official WeChat post, September 2017)

Public1^{lxxii} celebrated the national day through a week-long programme entitled the *Chinese Culture Week*, where a series of patriotic and cultural events had the purpose of showcasing its teachers’ mastery of traditional Chinese art forms, but also of shaping the children’s collective consciousness, as the entire kindergarten turned its motto (and main curriculum goal) - *“I have a Chinese heart, I am a citizen of the world”* - into reality (Public1 WeChat post, September 2017). Hence, according to Principal Deng (PU1K8), these activities had the dual goal of *“nurturing patriotic education and the Chinese cultural spirit.”*

In line with Teacher Yun (PU1K9), the kindergarten’s goal of shaping *“global citizens with a Chinese heart”* means that it strives to make all its children feel they belong in Shanghai and grow up to love both China and their city. According to her, this motto reflects both the city’s international environment and the many nationalities that attend this kindergarten. Moreover, to cement the children and teachers’ emotional connection to China, every morning the national flag is raised by both the local and international classes. However, only the senior classes perform the flag-raising ceremony, since the teaching staff believes that pre-k and K1 children are too young to understand the patriotic significance behind this ritual.

Their patriotic activities in September 2017 were widely promoted on their WeChat account, with *“Speeches under the National Flag”* being an event where volunteer parents and children gave short talks to *“express their warm wishes to the motherland”* (WeChat post, September 2017) Ripe with patriotic verbiage, as expressed in the above vignette, it had the function of aligning the kindergarten with the official rhetoric. The speeches were succeeded by the ubiquitous activity of the raising of the flag ceremony, performed by children dressed in military uniforms, and ended with the entire gathering of children, parents and teachers singing the national anthem.

As has become tradition in most public kindergartens in recent years (PU1K9), representatives from the local police force came to delight the children with a training exercise and showed them how the ‘professionals’ perform the raising of the flag ceremony. After seeing soldiers or police officers march, the usual activity is for the children to imitate them and, aligned in perfect columns and led by their teachers, parade around the inner yard. Public1 added a new component to this activity by having both teachers and selected children dress up in various ethnic minority costumes and perform folk dances, in order to emphasize that China’s cultural diversity is unified under a single national culture (PU1K8). In April 2018, the Chinese K2 stream had another patriotic activity entitled *“Being a soldier”* (*zuo dangbing* 做当兵), where, according to Teacher Wu (PU1K10), the children were taught by guest soldiers *“how to march properly in their uniforms and wave the national flag in the correct fashion.”*

To understand how Public1 perceives the significance of these patriotic celebrations, specifically to what extent they designed the activities to please the Centre's directive for more patriotic content since the 2010 Education Reform, I interviewed Teacher Yun, the head teacher of the international stream. The interview took place in March 2018, as I wanted to give the kindergarten enough time to respond to any potential new demands made on the kindergarten following the 19th National Congress. To my question on whether they were asked by the SEB or their local education bureau to promote more Chinese values recently, Teacher Yun (PU1K9) said this was something the kindergarten had already been asked to do and been implementing for years, especially since a demonstration kindergarten with an international stream had to be beyond reproach from an ideological standpoint, as it is spearheading Chinese ECE.

Confirming its positioning as being between the Centre and the Periphery as a *Space-in-Between*, but gravitating towards the Centre in terms of an ideological alignment with the Party, Public1 came across as taking great pride in its trademark “*global citizen with a Chinese heart*” motto, which it explains as children from both its local (Chinese pupils) and international (foreigners) classes learning about different countries and cultures, so acquiring a global view of the world, but, at their core, being patriotic citizens (PU1K8).

5.5.1.2 Public2 Kindergarten: With a red flag in my hand, patriotic enthusiasm is born in my heart

Public2 kindergarten held a grand-scale celebration of China's National Day, an expected concentration of efforts given its China-focused curriculum, history of similar patriotic activities,^{lxxiii} and close ties with the CP through its Principal Lin, a Party branch secretary. Moreover, its official WeChat posts abounded in references to traditional Chinese and Shanghainese culture infused with patriotic sentiment,^{lxxiv} while the interviews with its management and K2 teaching staff mirror the patriotic verbiage of the Centre's dominant discourse.

Out of the three public kindergartens observed, Public2 is the space most shaped by the official rhetoric on the dissemination of socialist and traditional Chinese values, but is also the preschool where Shanghainese culture is most celebrated. While Public1 prides itself on being more ‘global,’ as it has both a local and international stream, and Public3's curriculum is centred around an ‘ecological civilisation,’ Public2 is an elite ‘Shanghainese’ kindergarten where local culture is heavily emphasised. Principal Deng is a ‘lao Shanghai ren’ (老上海人) whose family has lived in Shanghai for many generations, so she feels it is her duty to keep her local culture alive (PU2K12). Moreover, because the kindergarten is situated in a central district, is also caters to many ‘old Shanghainese’ and it is not uncommon for the staff to speak Shanghainese among themselves. Anecdotally, my friend Carol, who introduced me to all the public kindergarten principals I interviewed, is also an ‘old Shanghainese’ and first talked to the directors in Shanghainese, then switched to Mandarin so I could understand the conversation as well. As opposed to the current situation in Hong Kong (Vickers 2022), for example, Public2 staff did not shy away from recognising and promoting a local, Shanghainese identity, including the use of the Shanghainese language, as it did not see this distinctiveness as antagonistic to the regime's definition of ‘Chineseness.’

I posit that this preschool is striving to closely follow Space1's every suggestion pertaining to the ideological direction of its curriculum, as well as the running of its daily activities. Consequently, it is the only one among the three who does not and has never celebrated either Halloween or Christmas, as, according to its Vice-Principal Hua (PU2K13), it does not want to teach its children any holidays that are not Chinese, especially ones with religious undertones like Christmas: “*we are Chinese, so there is no reason to celebrate other countries' festivals.*”

Given that the Mid-Autumn Festival closely preceded China's National Day, the kindergarten decided to fuse the two and organised a week-long event, where both traditional and local culture, as well as patriotism were merged in engaging activities for the children, like putting together Thinking Maps promoting Chinese landmarks and achievement.^{lxxv} Throughout October 2017 a significant number of WeChat posts also covered how the kindergarten was following the 19th National Congress during staff meetings, pictures of the teachers diligently taking notes while watching Xi's speech on TV being used to evidence their patriotic behaviour. This zeal in showcasing political correctness on social media reached its zenith in the pictures of individual teachers listening to the speeches of different political figures (Xi Jinping's being the most prevalent) in their classrooms and even during their lunch break (Public2 WeChat post, October 2017).

On the last day of September, the kindergarten organised an open-doors event where the children, their parents, and grandparents - all dressed in red or traditional Chinese clothing and waving Chinese flags - watched a raising of the flag ceremony performed by military personnel. Some children also participated in this activity, which had a very respectful and serious air. The moment a small child ceremoniously gave a folded flag to a parade officer had the caption "Wait for me to grow up. I will defend the country just as you do,"^{lxxvi} which has a strong militaristic undercurrent, consistent with the message disseminated in Public1 during their April 2018 "Being a soldier" event. Another picture captured rows of differently-aged children waving the national flag and wearing small flag stickers on their faces, with the accompanying message: "With a five-star red flag in hand, fluttering in the wind/ Patriotic enthusiasm is being born in my heart."^{lxxvii} Both messages used a language and structure that are quintessentially Chinese in promoting patriotism and showcase what this kindergarten stands for in terms of its ideology, namely its complete allegiance to the Party and the ideological goals of the 2010 Education Reform and its subsequent ECE policies.

Overall, Public2 kindergarten put a lot of effort into building a public image of having a patriotic staff dutifully aligned with the Centre, as well as of a curriculum that embodies the Party line of cultivating moral individuals who love their country.

5.5.1.3 Public3 Kindergarten: Take a child's hand and place the Party flag in our hearts

The national day celebration in Public3 kindergarten took place in the last week of September 2017 under the patriotic motto "*Take a child's hand and place the Party flag in our hearts,*" a similar line to that of Public2, with the addition of mentioning that believing in the Party is what makes one a true patriot. This preschool held a patriotic activity for senior class children focused on the significance of the national flag, as a culmination of the monthly theme "I love China" (*aiguo* 爱国), a variation on the official theme of 'patriotism' proposed in the Learning Activity manual issued by Shanghai Education Publishing.

According to Teacher Wen (PU3K17), the event, also called "Keep the Party flag in your heart," revolved around the participation of Party members from the university affiliated with Public3, as well as the local Party branch leader. This information was corroborated by an official WeChat post (Public3 WeChat post, November 2017) showing the teaching staff and local Party members dressed in the same uniform, preparing and coordinating the activity with smiles on their faces, even braiding their hair in the popular two-braid Communist style. Moreover, the symbolism of the colour red, predominant in both the pictures, was explained through the patriotic poem below:

*"Red, showing warmth and liberty
Red, symbolising happiness and good fortune
Red contains life's rhythm and vitality*

Red, gestating the ideals and hopes of life.”^{lxxviii}

In many pictures, the children were wearing navy, army, and air force uniforms - chosen to signify their pride in China’s military strength (PU3K16) - and were singing the “March of the Volunteers.” Seven designated K2 children, both girls and boys, representing the three branches of the military, were photographed marching, heads held high, holding the flag between them and performing the raising of the flag ceremony. The activity continued with primary school pioneers talking to the kindergarten children about the importance of the red necktie, helped by a kindergarten teacher who was also a Party member. The activity continued with an interactive Q&A event, where the local Party Secretary explained the difference between the national flag and the Party flag and, according to the post, “*helped the children understand the CCP and the significance of the Party flag and emblem*” (Public3 WeChat post, November 2017).

Next, the Party members and teachers gave a performance where they sang and danced on “Sparkling Red Star,” a popular patriotic song, followed by a collective dance with the children on another patriotic classic, “Great China.” This patriotic activity finished with everyone singing “We all have a home, its name is China,” a song selected as a “*blessing for the motherland*” (Public3 WeChat post, November 2017).

This joint event between Space1.2, the local Party branch, and Space2 showcases their close ties and is also an example of how recent legislation like the 2018 *Kindergarten Party Branch Work Plan*^{lxxix} is shaping kindergarten activities. This celebration fits with the document’s definition of a successful Party-building project, explanation also provided by Public3 on its official WeChat account, where it explains the event was a response to “*General Secretary Xi’s emphasis that it is necessary to raise the cultural confidence of the nation’s children [by having them] directly experience pride and self-confidence for growing-up in Great China, under the guidance of the Party*” (Public3 WeChat post, November 2017). The celebration is described as a success thanks to the harmonious cooperation between teachers, Party members and children, with the teaching staff and Party members presenting themselves as the unified, patriotic body of the “*comrades of the CCP*” and the participating K2 children as “*little Party members*” (Ibid.).

I decided to include these detailed ethnographic descriptions of the celebration of China’s National Day in three elite public kindergartens to introduce the reader to the main rituals through which patriotism is taught to the children and performed for the parents and the Centre. The actors disseminating this discourse were the three preschool principals, supported by their teaching staff, while their subjects shaped by these values were the children. However, the magnitude of this event and why I label it as ‘performing patriotism’ is that the primary audience it was intended for was not the children, but the parents and local community, with the goal of showcasing these kindergartens. Moreover, the second target audience was Space1, especially local Party representatives, who were also guests of honour in all three preschools.

Activities like listening to the national anthem and the raising of the flag ceremony are performed if not daily then at least once a week in all three kindergartens and are described as “*children’s initial experience of the national spirit*” (Public3 Kindergarten official website), but the national day celebrations elevated them to a grand performance by adding a military parade and speeches by Party officials. An entire week was permeated by socialist rhetoric and the children were taught that there is no distinction between the Party and their motherland, that loving their country means loving their leaders and the Communist Party.

Overall, the way China’s National Day was celebrated is a clear indicator of the strong ties between Space2 and local Party branches, showing the extent of the Centre’s control over shaping public kindergarten curricula by expecting public kindergartens to organise patriotic

activities with a large number of participants, as well as media coverage (by the local press and on their respective official websites and WeChat accounts).

5.5.1.4 Parental views on China's National Day celebrations and Chinese identity

After looking at the similar narratives constructed by kindergarten management and staff in the dissemination of socialist values during their week-long celebration of China's national day I will focus on a different perspective, namely that of the parents. I analyse the parents' positioning vis-à-vis this discourse from their dual capacity as agents at home, where they decide what to teach the children and how, as well as Foucauldian subjects of disciplinary power in a kindergarten setting, where they exercised self-censorship to exhibit appropriate behaviour. In the latter instance they were subjected to a disciplinary discourse constructed by the principals in accordance with the expectations of Space1 and implemented with the help of the teaching staff. The data I rely on is the first round of parent questionnaires I collected in Public1 (28 respondents) and Public3 (37 respondents) in November 2017, after the celebration of China's National Day and (where available) Halloween, on the premise that their memory of both holidays was still fresh and mostly accurate.

Hence, I went beyond analysing how Space2 performed patriotism to look at how parents internalised these events and what narratives they shared with their children and how. I wanted to see to what extent the parents contributed to disseminating socialist values to their children at home, and how they themselves perceived this celebration, especially since I posit that the parents (primary caretakers) and kindergarten teachers are the two main actors shaping young children's perception of the world. As I could not observe the kindergartens in early October because I did not yet have my ethics approval this analysis is missing the fourth actor, the children.

I included three specific questions in the open-end parent questionnaire distributed in late October 2017 (Table 5.1 below), aimed at collecting data to reflect (1) how the parents of two K2 classes (one being the K2 class I observed throughout the year) thought their child celebrated the national day at kindergarten, as well as (2) how they celebrated it at home and (3) what they told their child about the significance of this particular day. Moreover, to link this topic even stronger with this section's goal, namely, to analyse the patriotic discourse surrounding China's National Day, I added two questions targeting the parents by asking them to define what their (4) Chinese identity and (5) Chinese culture mean to them. The latter question is analysed in the last section of this chapter, *Performing Traditional Chinese Culture*, where I discuss the celebration of the Spring Festival.

When asked how their child's kindergarten celebrated the national day, most Public3 respondents mentioned the same activities: singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs (like Big China), making a flag craft, and telling patriotic stories. Surprisingly, watching a military parade, learning about "*the national characteristics of the motherland*" (PUB3_QUEST1_14/37) and patriotic stories were only mentioned once each by different respondents, an extremely surprising fact since these are the things emphasized on the kindergarten's official coverage of the event, which many parents took part in.

Moreover, even though the whole activity was shaped by the kindergarten's close collaboration with its local CP branch and was driven by the motto "*Having the Party flag in our heart*," none of the parents mentioned this connection. Only one respondent said that "*the teacher also talked about the Communist Party and the Chinese people*," (PUB3_QUEST1_11/37) the only reference to the CP I found. None of the 37 respondents mentioned that Party members participated in the festivities at all, even though their speeches were a key event according to Public3 kindergarten's WeChat posts (November 2017).

In Public1 kindergarten the parents provided a lot less detail than their counterparts in Public3 regarding the way they thought the kindergarten celebrated the national day, only mentioning a military parade and singing the national anthem. Over 80% referenced the kindergarten asking them to take pictures of the family waving the national flag during their Golden Week travels, and then have their child bring them to kindergarten to make an “*I love China*” collage in each classroom. Only one parent mentioned an activity connected with the CP, a class visit to the Site of the First National Congress of the CPC.^{lxxx}

In terms of celebrating the national day with the family, most Public1 and Public3 parents and children watched the National Day Parade on TV, made a flag, sang the national anthem and patriotic songs, and went travelling. Three of the Public3 respondents took their children to Tian’An Men Square to see the parade, while another went on a family trip to “*see the great rivers and mountains of the motherland*” (PUB3_QUEST1_18/37). When detailing what they did during that holiday, Public1 parents used phrases that were a lot less patriotic than their counterparts in Public3, but three of them did mention their purpose for travelling across China was for their children to “*experience the strength of the motherland*” (PUB1_QUEST1_24/28), “*the country’s outstanding development and modern cities*” (PUB1_QUEST1_07/28) and to “*understand the beauty of the motherland*” (PUB1_QUEST1_8/28).

At home, the children were told about China’s history in patriotic terms, namely to “*love the motherland, as the motherland is our mother,*” (PUB3_QUEST1_1/37) and about “*the strength of our motherland and the hard work of our ancestors to make China great*” (PUB3_QUEST1_15/37). Other parents shared the origins of the national day and “*why we should celebrate this special day every year and cherish this time of peace*” (PUB3_QUEST1_11/37), adding that “*patriotic education is a language my child can easily understand*” (PUB3_QUEST1_35/37). Public1 respondents were again less effervescent in their answers, opting to use less emotional and much broader terms, only mentioning teaching their offspring about their country’s history and culture.

The China-centric comments emphasizing the feelings of pride for both the Party’s achievements and China’s current development, as well as the country’s unique culture were collected in the questions about Chinese identity and Chinese culture. As follows, 80% of Public1 parents mentioned the feeling of ‘pride’ (自豪 *zìháo*) and emphasized it with a plethora of poetic and patriotic explanations like “*where I belong*” (PUB1_QUEST1_1/28), and “*everlasting roots, my motherland*” (PUB1_QUEST1_5/28).

The association between being Chinese and an implicit connection with the CP was made by 5 of the 28 respondents in Public1, who explicitly mentioned loving the Party. One respondent said that “*the motherland is becoming stronger and stronger because of our leaders and I am proud of being Chinese*” (PUB1_QUEST1_10/28). One view that stood out, held by two parents, was that being Chinese meant being part of a collective, of functioning as a part of a whole: “*I am very proud to me a member of the country*” (PUB1_QUEST1_22/28), whose duty was to “*be the master of the country, build the country, defend the country, and have responsibilities and obligations*” (PUB1_QUEST1_20/28).

Moreover, 25% of Public1 respondents took great pride in what they perceived to be China’s superiority as a current world leader economically, as well as culturally. In terms of China’s cultural heritage, many China-centric phrases were used, like “*the legacy of Easternisation*” (PUB1_QUEST1_2/28), “*my home is in the middle [of the world]*” (PUB1_QUEST1_4/28) - a reference to China being the Middle Kingdom, and “*an incomparable nation with 5000 years of splendid culture*” (PUB1_QUEST1_8/28). Four parents emphasised China’s superiority, with taking “*pride in the world’s only continuously inherited culture*” (PUB1_QUEST1_12/28) and having an “*exemplary education based on Chinese language and culture, where English is just a tool*” (PUB1_QUEST1_25/28) standing

out. For China's privileged positioning in the world system, respondents referred to "*being proud to communicate with countries around the world on an equal footing*" (PUB1_QUEST1_12/28), as well as to "*China becoming a superpower because of its strong economy and military*" (PUB1_QUEST1_6/28).

In Public3 kindergarten 79% of the parents also mentioned being proud of being Chinese and associated it with a feeling of belonging, with their roots and with patriotism. Three of them said they were being honoured to be "*descendants of the dragon,*" word choice that indicates they feel privileged to be Chinese because of their country's history. Moreover, two respondents linked their Chinese identity with the feeling of security derived from China's military and economic strength, as "*the motherland protects you, no matter where you are in the world*" (PUB3_QUEST1_8/38) and "*China is a safe and peaceful country, with a strong military that can defend us*" (PUB3_QUEST1_22/38).

There was no direct mention of the Party in either of the 38 questionnaires, nor of the patriotic expressions that imbued the answers collected in Public1 kindergarten. While taking pride in China's cultural heritage was mentioned by 21% of the Public3 parents, most did not use wording that emphasized China's superiority or special history (the exception being the "descendants of the dragon" reference) but opted for an unbiased word choice, like "*Easternness*" (*dongfang* 东方), "*a profound cultural heritage*" (PUB3_QUEST1_28/38), and "*the inheritance and dissemination of a cultural tradition*" (PUB3_QUEST1_15/38).

My analysis details the celebration of China's National Day in each kindergarten, showing the remarkable similarities in terms of the patriotic rituals performed for this event. It was not surprised to see children and adults wear red clothes or traditional garments and wave red flags, nor perform the raising of the flag ceremony or sing the national anthem, as these are rituals commonplace throughout the world when celebrating a country's national day. However, asking five- and six-year-olds to dress up as soldiers and march in uniforms after listening to speeches about China's military prowess raises some concerns regarding the extent to which the Centre, working through kindergartens, is promoting a narrative of Chinese superiority and military power, departing from promoting healthy patriotism to disseminate a nationalist perception of the self, an "*unyielding loyalty to and identification with one's own nation*" (Carpenter 2019). This feeling of pride in both the country and the Party because of China's culture, as well as economic and military rise is being propagated through a series of repetitive activities throughout the school year, which I approach as Beijing using a "*familiarity breeds consent*" (Monger 2015) strategy. This is coupled with the myth of Chinese exceptionalism (Ross 2014), best captured in the '5000 years of history' mantra, a line I have come across not only during my fieldwork, but also in the years working in ECE in Shanghai.

This idea of China's superiority due to having a longer history and civilization than other countries, as well as restoring its former glory after a century of humiliation (Wang 2012) through the core socialist values at the national level of 'prosperity and strength' (*fuqiang* 富强) (Schell and Delury 2013) come through, to a small extent, in the parent questionnaires as well, in their views on Chinese identity and culture. However, in both Public1 and Public3 most parents exhibited expected patriotic feelings by saying how proud they are to be Chinese and rarely used a nationalist discourse. In terms of how they celebrated the national day at home, the activities listed, like watching a military parade on TV, singing the national anthem or travelling are common throughout the world, the same as sharing stories about the motherland's past with one's Children. In Public1 only of 18% of respondents mentioned the CCP as a reason to be proud to be Chinese, while none of the 38 parents in Public3 made any reference to China's ruling class.

In the next section I discuss the celebration of the Chinese New Year and Lantern Festival in all three public kindergartens as an expression of "cultivating people" (*shuren* 树人) in its

instance of disseminating moral education (Xue and Jian 2020) through traditional Chinese values like the importance of the family and filial piety.

5.5.2 Performing traditional Chinese culture: Narratives of the Spring Festival

In connection with my research question, in this part I investigate how effective the Centre's strategy of asking public kindergartens to promote more values and citizenship education has been in disseminating traditional culture through the celebration of the 2018 Spring Festival. This discussion tackles how and why Space2, defined as a social space of identity formation where subjects conform with and rarely negotiate with the Centre's homogenising power produced similar narratives on traditional Chinese culture. The actors I am looking at are the teaching staff, K2 parents, and (to a limited extent) senior class children, their interactions being observed and assessed within the spatial confines of the kindergartens, where they were subjected to the Centre's discourse promoting traditional Chinese culture.

In line with Kubat (2018) I am approaching Space1's recent emphasis on the dissemination of traditional culture as a mechanism to increase the Party's legitimacy and as an integral part of the discourse on moral education. Xi Jinping's concept of "strengthening moral education to cultivate people" (*lideshuren* 立德树人) has three instances, namely "developing great virtue," "obeying social morality," and "upholding personal morals" for *strengthening moral education* (*lide* 立德), while *cultivating people* (*shuren* 树人) is an umbrella term referring to different educational instances for building patriotic citizens, like moral, sports or intellectual education (Xue and Jian 2020). I ascribe the Spring Festival to the "cultivating people" dimension, as an example of promoting moral education by disseminating traditional Chinese culture. The analysis is based on my observation of activities related to the Chinese New Year (CNY) and Lantern Festival, data from official WeChat posts, as well as interviews with kindergarten staff and parent questionnaires and is addressed in a separate section for each kindergarten.

5.5.2.1 Public1 Kindergarten: Experience and inherit the essence of traditional Chinese culture

The 2018 Spring Festival in Public1 kindergarten was a month-long affair, extensively promoted on social media and dominating the curriculum. The activities, including the Lantern Festival, were covered in 10 posts on the kindergarten's official WeChat account, the high number indicating that this was the most important festival of the academic year. Online, the kindergarten disseminated a narrative shaped by traditional elements, both visually and content-wise, where children, parents and teachers came together to celebrate the family. Thus, the entries were presented on Chinese latticework backgrounds, with red as the predominant colour, dog images to welcome the Year of the Dog, as well as the Chinese character for luck (*fu* 福).

I visited the kindergarten twice during this timeframe, as well as collected the second round of parent questionnaires in March 2018, so I accumulated an extensive amount of data. Given the length constraints of this thesis I could only include a brief analysis of this holiday celebration, as well as its significance for teachers, parents and children.

For Teacher Yun (PU1K9), while her kindergarten's international stream emphasises Western festivals, the local stream is mostly shaped by promoting local culture through decorations, festivals and traditional art and music, which reached their zenith in their celebration of the Spring Festival (see activities in Tables 5.2 below and 5.3 below). Teacher

Shan (PU1K11) also explained that holidays are the best opportunity to expose the children to traditional values and ensure they *“inherit Chinese culture and love our country, have a sense of belonging by knowing our shared history and culture.”* However, she was careful to not express a nationalist view, explaining that *“we should also teach children to accept other countries’ culture and not be arrogant. We should care about the world, but we must also know we are Chinese, that these are our roots and have national self-esteem”* (Ibid.).

Both K2 teachers Shan (PU1K11) and Wu (PUK10) shared that they made sure to teach the children as much as possible about the traditions surrounding this holiday because they felt it was their duty as Chinese citizens to keep them alive. For example, a corner of their classroom exhibited a display, put together by the children, of various customs, like honouring the Kitchen God during the Little New Year (*xiaonian* 小年). During this activity the teachers took the children to the inner yard, where they performed the ritual of burning an image of the Kitchen God to send his spirit to Heaven. Moreover, the learning environment was decorated with spring couplets and papercutting made by the children, as auspicious decorations for the New Year.

During the Chinese New Year week, held in late February, both children and parents took part in a series of fun activities, with each day focusing on a certain aspect of the festival (Table 5.2 below). Young and old, all dressed in traditional clothing, could practice their calligraphy, make spring rolls, play traditional instruments and fold paper dogs to greet the new year, as well as talk about how they celebrated at home. The week ended with a performance inspired by traditional culture from the south of the Yangtze River, where the teachers played the *guzheng* and *pipa*. According to the English version of a February 2018 WeChat post, the event was meant for both parents and children to *“feel the kindergarten’s Chinese heart by bringing traditional customs into daily life and have the children experience first-hand the essence and beauty of traditional culture.”*

In another February post, the kindergarten collected pictures of children celebrating the Spring Festival with their families, the result being a collage of how modern Chinese families celebrate the CNY. Their purpose was to *“show the Spring Festival under lens, [...] our customs are being kept alive by the new generation.”* The analysis of the parent questionnaire, when I asked the parents how they celebrated this festival at home, shows that the same customs as performed in kindergarten were upheld within the family, from cooking together to having a family dinner and giving lucky money.

I observed a senior class from the Chinese stream during the Lantern Festival, held on 2nd March 2018 (see observation notes in Table 5.4 below), as the children were decorating their classroom and hallway with colourful lanterns they had made at home, interwoven with spring couplets and arts-and-crafts dogs. Public1 carried out a series of rich activities throughout the entire week, their goal yet again being for both children and teachers to *“taste the charm of China through folk activities and inherit the essence of traditional Chinese culture”* (WeChat post, March 2018). This celebration culminated with a two-day event, where the teachers’ aim was to ensure the children experienced as wide a range of traditional activities as possible, to *“live out Chinese culture in colourful festivals and activities, and thus enhance their sense of identity and pride towards the excellence of Chinese culture”* (PU1K9).

My observations revealed that the majority of senior class children were familiar with many customs and took great pleasure in taking part in the activities (vignette in Table 5.5 below). While the deeper meaning behind these traditions eluded them because of their young age, seeing this holiday as mainly an opportunity to play, by performing these rituals both at kindergarten and at home (the latter supported by the parent questionnaire) they were forging a shared identity. Thus, the children all knew the story of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac,

of the monster Nian and the need to light fireworks, as well as about ‘lucky’ customs like eating dumplings and receiving red envelopes.

5.5.2.2 Public2 Kindergarten: Family reunion and filial piety

In Public2 kindergarten I had two different opportunities to observe the celebration of the Chinese New Year, namely a calligraphy lesson given by a father in January and a cooking activity hosted by four grandmothers one month later. The two observations helped me better understand how the kindergarten and parents cooperated in organising activities and reinforced my argument that family members are invited only on special occasions and have to comply with the principal and head teacher’s instructions as to the content of their lessons. Moreover, while the children proved to be too young to assimilate the plethora of information being disseminated, they all knew the Spring Festival revolved around the family coming together, eating delicious foods like tangyuan, receiving red envelopes filled with money and displaying spring couplets on doors for good luck.

My first observation, on 11th January 2018, was of a Chinese calligraphy activity around the story of the Spring Festival couplets organised by a parent. The father, a calligraphy aficionado, packed a lot of information in his presentation on the origin of spring couplets, as well as on how to use a calligraphy brush and correctly write the character 福 (fu), meaning ‘luck.’ The majority of the children were already familiar with the custom of hanging spring couplets on doors, as they brought good fortune and kept their families safe from ghosts. Also, many could fluently read Chinese characters, as they were shown the story of the Door Gods, which they read out loud in a chorus.

After the volunteer parents left, Teacher Mei told her class about the importance of keeping their traditions alive, pointing out that one of the most important is Chinese calligraphy. She emphasized that this is an ancient art form that requires dedication and diligence, and that anyone would be proud of them if they could write beautiful characters: *“Any well-educated Chinese should have this skill [calligraphy]. You will not only write beautifully, but your character will also become better, as you will learn to be more patient”* (Observation, 11 Jan. 2018). I asked Teacher Xiao if this activity had any connection with promoting the 12 core socialist values and she explained that practicing calligraphy is teaching children *dedication* (*jingye* 敬业), which is an individual level value, but that all their activities nurture friendship (*youshan* 友善) and patriotism (*aiguo* 爱国) (Observation, 11 Jan. 2018).

My second visit was six weeks later, as four grandmothers visited the senior class children to teach them how to make four traditional snacks. The day started with a Circle Time session on riddles, where Teacher Mei asked for volunteers to read their lantern riddle in front of the class, and have their peers guess the answer. Afterwards, she showed them how to hold a calligraphy brush properly and invited them to copy new year wishes on some banners. I used the following free play time window to chat with the two classroom teachers about the kindergarten’s two-day celebration of the Spring Festival^{lxxxix}. They were keen to talk about the grand scale of the activity, as well as that it was covered by the local media. On the second day, a Saturday, the parents, and grandparents joined their children in celebrating the CNY by doing a wide range of activities targeting traditional customs. Everyone wore traditional Chinese clothing, and the teachers took a video of the children wishing their loved ones a happy new year while doing the customary hand gesture, the fist and palm salute. The video, as expected, was shared on the K2-1 WeChat group.

Another activity, held on a separate day, had the senior class pupils wish a “Happy New Year” to the younger children, as well as give them red envelopes and small chocolate gifts, like gold coins that symbolise luck. Everyone also wore Chinese-style clothes again and walked down a catwalk together to show off their clothes. According to Teacher Xiao, this Chinese

New Year fashion show was organised for the children to have fun wearing beautiful traditional Chinese clothes and take pride in being Chinese (Observation, 28 Feb. 2018).

In line with Teacher Mei (PU2K15), for a whole week she and her co-teacher talked about the meaning of most common New Year myths and customs. To make the children more aware of the significance of this festival, during the winter vacation preceding this festival they also gave their pupils the small task of preparing some blessings in a poem format. The ensuing activity, based on a popular TV programme, had the children work together in groups to discuss their poems. According to her, this was an interactive way to have the children learn more about ancient poems, as well as give them the agency to interpret their meaning independently, without the teachers' guidance.

During my observation, the main activity was based on the core tradition of the Spring Festival, namely the family coming together, and involved four grandmothers teaching the children how to make traditional Chinese snacks. The fact that the older generation was invited to teach the youngest to make food, filial piety being revered in Chinese culture, also shows that keeping traditions alive is still very important in China, even in a modern setting like Shanghai. For Teacher Xiao (Observation, 28 Feb. 2018), Chinese culture is all about traditions being passed down, with grandparents being the most respected because they have many years of experience and many stories to teach the young. Moreover, the Spring Festival is her favourite celebration because,

“it is filled with ancient customs that refer to family reunions, collective activities that bring the family together. Because work usually keeps us very busy, ‘reunion’ is the key word for this holiday, when we can cherish the time we spend together as a happy family. That is what I wanted to teach my children, to love and respect their parents and grandparents.”

This cooking activity was concluded by watching a short film about family reunion and a Q&A session led by Teacher Mei, who wanted to make sure everyone understood the most important traditions. However, as shown in the vignette in Table 5.6 below, given the children's young age they got easily distracted by other things and they did not really get the point she was trying to make, which did not deter her from persevering in her task.

This observation gave me great insight into the great efforts Public2's management and teachers made in order to teach the children as much as possible about the Spring Festival and its traditions and invited volunteer parents and grandparents to disseminate values like friendship, filial piety and the importance of family. Similar to what happened in Public1, the children were too young to assimilate this wealth of information, but they already knew the most important CNY customs and their significance. However, in Public2 many parents and grandparents were involved in the organising activities related to the Spring Festival, from teaching the children calligraphy and how to make tangyuan to helping them make a dragon and performing the dragon dance with them. The narrative they disseminated aligned with the Centre's 'strengthening moral education to cultivate people' discourse, while their enthusiasm to get involved in class events also suggests their genuine support for promoting traditional values.

5.5.2.3 Public3 Kindergarten: Guessing Lantern Festival riddles

While Public3 organised a special activity to celebrate the CNY, the event did not match the magnitude I observed in the other two kindergartens, with the preschool being sparsely decorated and only two posts promoting it on WeChat. This minimalist decor was in line with the kindergarten's approach to all the festivals throughout the academic year, as Principal Lin (PU3K16) explained their core philosophy, namely that modesty is a virtue. Also, according to Teacher Wen (PU3K17), because the preschool is affiliated with a famous university, so it is

implicitly a very good kindergarten in the public eye, management does not prioritise boosting its prestige by promoting opulent manifestations on social media.

I observed a senior class on 27th February 2018, when their main activity was centred around lantern riddles: the children, most of them wearing clothes from the Tang dynasty, formed small groups and tried to guess the riddles their peers had brought to kindergarten. Teacher LinLin explained that this was a competition, with the winner receiving a prize. As a warm-up the class wished one another variations of New Year blessing while doing the fist and palm salute. While most riddles were too difficult for the children to figure out without the two teachers' help, they were really engaged and spent a long time debating the answers among themselves. This competitive spirit was nurtured by Teacher Wen, who told them that they were playing an ancient game from the Song Dynasty and that only smart people could answer these riddles.

The event concluded with a group discussion on how the children had spent the CNY with their families, which served as a great opportunity for Teacher LinLin to reinforce the main traditions of this festivals (vignette in Table 5.7 below). The children's answers indicate that they had a better grasp of Spring Festival customs than their counterparts in Public1 and Public2, but also that Public3 teachers had been more driven in disseminating what they considered to be the most important traditions for this festival. As opposed to the other two public kindergartens, where the children had more opportunities to engage with the Spring Festival in a creative manner, here the activities were more teacher-driven and information-heavy, with the underlying message that it is their responsibility as the future generation to keep China's customs alive.

During my follow-up visit on 20th March 2018 I had the opportunity to talk with both Teacher Wen and Teacher LinLin about their week-long celebration of the Spring Festival. Hence, one of the activities the children had was a 'Red Envelope' event, where each of them had to fold a red envelope and draw or write a card with best wishes. Another activity was a dragon dance, the same as in Public2, where the children made an arts and crafts dragon.^{lxxxiii} While these two activities were common for this holiday, the third was unique and took place in the Chinese garden section of the kindergarten, where a bridge crosses a small pond. The children, each carrying a lantern they had made at home, crossed over the bridge, performing a ritual that, according to Teacher Wen, would bring them luck in the new year. She told me this activity was inspired by the Shanghainese tradition of walking over the Zigzag Bridge at Chenghuang Temple, in the belief that with this walk a year's curved road has been removed, and the new year will be very smooth, devoid of any difficulties (PU3K17). On the same day the children made tangyuan under the guidance of Teacher Chen, with the kitchen staff serving it as a dessert. She also explained the origins of this dessert to her class, which originated in the Song dynasty.

Asked whether there was a structure behind the celebration of the Spring Festival and if the Centre had asked for a certain content to be disseminated, Teacher LinLin (PU3K18) said that the SEB had not given kindergartens a detailed lesson plan, but that, as a Chinese, she knew what to teach the children about her country's new year traditions. Of interest is that the parents were not involved in any of these activities, in contrast with what I observed in Public1, but especially in Public2 kindergarten. However, the Public3 teachers were keener in teaching their children about a plethora of customs associated with the Spring Festival and saw it as their responsibility as Chinese citizens to ensure that future generations kept this traditional culture alive. The vignette in Table5.7 below showcases that these senior class children had internalised the main customs connected with this holiday and could easily reproduce them, more so than their counterparts in the other two public kindergartens.

The parents' views on the importance of Chinese culture are explored below and were collected in a second round of parent questionnaires in Public1 (42 respondents) and Public3

(39 respondents) in March 2018. While I included questions on how they believed their children had celebrated the Spring Festival at kindergarten and what traditions they shared with their children at home, I decided not to analyse these answers in a separate section because they did not add to the analysis: the answers mirror my observations, as well as the information collected from teachers and WeChat posts.

5.5.2.4 Parental views on Chinese culture

The analysis of the 81 parent questionnaires collected in March 2018 indicates that in both Public1 and Public3 the parents used similar language to define Chinese culture, connecting their feelings of pride for China's ancient past, which they described as filled with heroic exploits and scientific inventions, with the country's contemporary economic achievements, as well as with traits they perceive as being quintessentially Chinese, like wisdom, morality, and a love for erudition. These findings suggest that Beijing's vision of 'Chineseness' as a homogenous collective identity has been successfully internalised by the informants, who represent privileged socio-economic segments of Shanghai's population.

The majority of Public1 parents mentioned traditional Chinese culture as the core of their country's cultural heritage, traditional festivals being mentioned by 30 of the 42 respondents. Moreover, one parent (PUB1_QUEST2_40/42) associated it with the *xue zuoren* (学做人) Confucian understanding of moral education. Three respondents used a strongly nationalistic discourse, parroting language used by Xi himself and defining Chinese culture as "*the source of human values*" (PUB1_QUEST2_21/42), with "*China as the origin of civilization*" (PUB1_QUEST2_18/42) and Chinese culture as "*the blood and roots that are the strong foundation of China, the inner genes that make the Chinese confident and outstanding abroad*" (PUB1_QUEST2_06/42).

The more moderate answers gave examples for Chinese culture that match those I identified on the three kindergartens' official WeChat accounts, as well as on the lesson plans that targeted the dissemination of traditional culture, namely calligraphy, traditional musical instruments, traditional arts and crafts, the 24 solar terms, Chinese folklore, as well as Chinese philosophy (especially Confucianism) and poetry. One respondent equated Chinese culture with the roots of the Chinese nation, explaining that "*without a cultural legacy, there is no such thing as a nation*" (PUB1_QUEST2_31/42).

In terms of the adjectives provided, the Public1 parents listed the key words 'civilized,' 'polite,' 'grateful to society, grateful to parents and elders, and grateful to teachers,' 'educated,' 'honourable,' and 'moral.' Moreover, 39% connected Chinese culture with the notion of morality, be it by stating it directly or by mentioning its philosophy of respecting others, humanism and honour. While the core socialist values or socialist ideology were never mentioned per se, one parent did refer to the importance of remembering the century of humiliation in making sure China's "*rich and subtle beauty are preserved forever*" (PUB1_QUEST2_02/42).

The word most Public3 parents associated with Chinese culture was 'tradition' and linked it with the examples of celebrating traditional festivals, Chinese food, as well as filial piety and learning the Chinese classics. In line with the trend set by the question on how they defined their Chinese identity, the respondents used a more objective discourse, describing China's culture as "*rich material and spiritual wealth*" (PUB3_QUEST2_32/39) and "*an understanding of the world and oneself facilitated by filial piety and the harmony between man and nature*" (PUB3_QUEST2_15/39). Moreover, one parent offered a universally valid definition of culture, as an intrinsic component of humanity which "*brings self-awareness, a deeper foundation and a more versatile understanding of things, while a long history brings more experience and insight*" (PUB3_QUEST2_22/39). I argue that the complexity of these

answers reflects the fact that this kindergarten is affiliated with a leading Chinese university and that over 30% of the respondents have a PhD and work in academia. Thus, because of their higher educational level, these parents are more aware of the pitfalls of ascribing to Beijing's essentialist myth of China's homogeneity and 'outstanding traditional culture' and seeing the world in terms of cultural hierarchies, with China at the top. Given that this data was collected through parent questionnaires, I was wary of asking sensitive questions like whether they had a Party affiliation. That additional information would have allowed me to better understand whether this segment aligns with the official rhetoric in public, when CCP support serves to maintain one's socio-economic status, or if they maintain this more objective stance in their professional lives as well, not just in anonymous questionnaires.

Similar to Public1 parents, 43% associated Chinese culture with the notion of 'morality,' an umbrella term for key words such as 'tolerance,' 'fraternity,' 'modesty,' 'honour,' 'filial piety,' 'integrity,' 'harmony,' and 'patriotism.' Here, many of the 12 core socialist values were specifically named: the two national level values of *civility* and *harmony*, the social value of *equality*, and the individual values of *integrity*, *friendship*, and *patriotism*. These findings indicate that Public3 informants were more exposed to official doctrine and were more familiar with using the regime's verbiage, which might be a consequence of the nature of their occupation: teaching staff in China, from preschool to higher education, is expected to participate in meetings steeped in patriotic language, as well as take part in patriotic activities.

The parent questionnaire indicated no difference in how families celebrated at home or what cultural elements were taught by the parents. Moreover, in Public1 and Public2 kindergartens the parents were very involved in not just taking part in festivities, but also in organising the festival and teaching special lessons.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the effectiveness of Space1's strategy of disseminating values and citizenship education in public kindergartens by exploring the impact of the 19th National Congress on their operation and curricula, as well as how patriotism and traditional Chinese culture were disseminated in the case studies of China's National Day (2017) and the Spring Festival of 2018. I operated with two main spaces of analysis, the Centre and the Space-in-Between of public kindergartens (Space2), tackling what I construct to be the most important areas where Space1, working through the SEB and local Party branches, exerts its control. The instances were (1) enrolment, ranking and fees, (2) Space2's behaviour in response to the 19th NCCPC, especially the (3) dissemination of the 12 core socialist values through kindergarten curricula, and the case studies of (4) performing patriotism through China's National Day and (5) performing traditional Chinese culture through the Spring Festival.

I applied the concept of 'values and citizenship education' to limit the scope of my analysis to patriotism, one of the 12 core socialist values but also defined by the Centre as a separate issue, and traditional Chinese culture. I framed my operational term within the dominant discourse's homogenising rhetoric of "strengthening moral education to cultivate people" with its instances of "developing great virtue," "obeying social morality," "upholding personal morals" and "cultivating people," the latter an umbrella term referring to different educational instances for building patriotic citizens, like moral education (Xue and Jian 2020). I focused on the ways "developing great virtue" works through the dissemination of patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, as well as the presence of the 12 core socialist values, which are part of the "obeying social morality" dimension. I ascribed the Spring Festival to the "cultivating people" instance, as an example of promoting moral education by disseminating traditional Chinese culture. The analysis is based on my observation of activities related to the

Chinese New Year (CNY) and Lantern Festival, data from official WeChat posts, as well as interviews with kindergarten staff and parent questionnaires, and is addressed in a separate section for each kindergarten and each event.

My aim was to analyse the power relations between the regime – both at central and local level, kindergartens, and the individuals within these preschools, in terms of both juridical power and the more subtle avenues of biopower, acting as disciplinary power (e.g. Foucault 1981; 1983; 1991; and 2008). While China is a post-Socialist Leninist state that is predominantly shaped by judicial power, this does not mean that there are no spaces where Foucault's productive notion of power is not exercised over human bodies, like in the self-censorship of subjects in their dissemination of knowledge within the observed preschools.

The first dimension I analysed was that of negative power at work, namely the local legislation used to determine the enrolment, ranking, and fees of public kindergartens, which I complemented with three interviews with local education officials. The main ECE legislation shaping Space2 is the *STYAPs* and complementary documents like the *2012 Curriculum Guidelines*, with the latest regulations from 2018 focusing on building a patriotic teaching staff (e.g. *Kindergarten Party Branch Plan*). Operating with the notion of agency (Foucault 1995), I argued that public kindergartens have a hierarchical structure where the principal has the monopoly on power and both teaching staff and parents are subjected to it and devoid of agency within the constraints of Space2.

In the power relations between the Centre and Space-in-Between, because of ECE legislation and being funded by the local government, public kindergartens have no choice but to conform to the dominant discourse and use an SEB-approved curriculum, as well as construct a politically correct image, especially on social media. This means that the principals and teachers aligned with socialist ideology in both interviews and observations, but also that all three kindergartens used a 70-80% curriculum based on the Learning Activities Teacher Manual. Applying Foucault (1991), these subjects' conformity was ensured by disciplinary power, which shaped them as *obedient bodies* within a Panopticon system where their curricula, teaching patterns, special activities, even the teaching staff's behaviour are constantly observed by Beijing's reaching arms, namely the SEB and district education bureaus (Space1.1) and local Party branches (Space1.2). The former controls kindergartens, especially the principals' behaviour, through regular inspections, with the goal of ensuring they remain aligned with local legislation and use the approved curriculum. The latter projects its power through legislation like the *2018 Kindergarten Party Branch Work Plan* and the *Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct for Kindergarten Teacher*, having a representative in each public kindergarten, as at least one teacher must become a member of the local CCP branch (ES4). Moreover, the Party often organises activities to cultivate a patriotic staff and encourages them to use lesson plans it designed to forge the socialist builders of tomorrow. Moreover, these two agents work together to constantly monitor Space2's behaviour and disseminated discourse through periodic parent questionnaires, as well as monitoring their social media posts, another instance of panoptical surveillance at work.

I posit that this crude panoptic model of surveillance (Foucault 1991) shaped the behaviour of all three actors in Space2: the principals' behaviour and discourse mirrored that of the Centre and promoted patriotic and traditional Chinese activities, the six teachers I interviewed, even under the protection of anonymity, were careful to display political correctness, and even the parents aligned with the Centre in their patriotic answers collected in parent questionnaires. On the one hand, their responses could indicate their positioning as obedient bodies shaped by the internalisation of rules and regulations – in this case allegiance to the Party ingrained through public education, or as pragmatic actors who, aware that they might be watched at any moment and punished for any perceived misconduct, behave in a sanctioned manner. The most evident performative instance was when I looked at Space2's

behaviour in response to the 19th NCCPC, where all three public kindergartens (especially Public2), promoted a public image of a patriotic staff diligently listening to Chairman Xi's speech. Their ideological alignment with Xi's "strengthening moral education to cultivate people" discourse was also supported by the incorporation of the 12 core socialist values in kindergarten curricula, especially the four individual level values of dedication, integrity, patriotism, and friendship, with the latter two coming through in my analysis of performing patriotism by celebrating China's National Day and traditional Chinese culture disseminated through the Spring Festival.

I also demonstrated that disciplinary power also shapes top public kindergartens into being highly hierarchical polities, where the principal reigns supreme and the parents are limited in their agency because of the very nature of the system they enrol their children in. Due to the legislative grip the Centre has over enrolment, fees, and official ranking, exercised through Space1.1, public kindergartens have limited potential for agency, which they exercise in their original curriculum, which occasionally includes Western cultural elements (like the celebration of Halloween and Christmas, discussed in the next chapter). I posited that the principals of level one (*yiji* 一级) kindergartens, the highest rank possible, take great pride in this status and want to maintain it, as well as the financial privileges derived from their ranking. These two factors contribute to making them dependent on their aligning themselves ideologically with the dominant discourse. Moreover, all the three principals have strong ties with the Party, with Public1's Principal Deng boasting her membership on social media, Public2's Principal Ling always inviting Party officials to participate in kindergarten events, and Public3's Principal Lin being the local Party branch secretary in the district where the kindergarten is situated. Their affiliation makes them part of the panopticon system and reinforces the Centre's control over public kindergartens.

The principals also have absolute authority over their teaching staff and the parents whose children they enrol. I see their unchallenged authority by both parents and staff over everything that happens in their kindergartens as a clear success of the Centre's power to shape sanctioned behaviour in the Space-in-Between. This status quo is also supported by the fact that Shanghainese parents trust elite public kindergartens, both because they think they offer quality education and because they ensure their child's access to a good primary school. Space1.1's efforts to construct ECE as a public good in Shanghai (e.g. E01; EE6) and its future goals to build quality-driven education where ranking would become obsolete (see 2019-2021 *STYAP*), are known to the ordinary Chinese (e.g. ME5; EE7) and derive their legitimacy from the public's support. The public's endorsement is augmented by the Centre's commitment to affordable ECE, as the best public kindergartens only charged 700RMB/ month in 2017, while the local government provides a subsidy for every enrolled child, depending on the type and ranking of their respective kindergarten (EO2).

Based on the parent questionnaires, most parents are looking for a safe and happy environment for their children and want them to learn patriotic behaviour, as well as traditional Chinese culture. My analysis of parental views on both the celebration of China's National Day and the Spring Festival shows that the narratives and customs disseminated in the three kindergartens and those at home are very similar, with no discordant notes detected. The parents' involvement in Space2 was limited to when they were invited to participate in festival-related activities with their children, only Public1 and Public2 inviting family members to coordinate activities.

Patriotic content was analysed by looking at the dissemination of the 12 core socialist values through a discourse that young children could easily understand, like the daily rite of the raising of the flag ceremony, as well as through lessons praising China's great past and modern achievements, especially though monthly topics like "I am Chinese" or "I love China." The 2017 celebration of China's National Day was a performative affair I tackled based on

data from interviews, parent questionnaires, as well as official WeChat posts. The chosen celebratory activities, like children marching in uniform and speeches given by Party officials, coupled with patriotic narratives infused by socialist rhetoric advertised on the kindergartens' social media accounts evidence the power the Centre exerts over the Space-in-Between. I argue that, for public kindergartens, the National Day and the Spring Festival are the two most important holidays of the year, with the principals maximising these opportunities to both project a patriotic image, a performative act to assuage Space1 that their kindergartens are actively cultivating socialist builders, as well as impress the parents with their magnitude and thus raise their prestige in the local community.

A common fallacy of both Chinese and global discourses trying to define what it means to be 'Chinese' is presupposing that Chinese identity is unitary and invariant. The 'homogeneity stereotype' purposefully glosses over the many layers of interweaving identities encompassed by the operational category 'Chineseness,' which, in the case of this thesis, are asserted in the specific spatial location of elite Shanghainese kindergartens. As such, 'Shanghaineness' is also not to be analysed as a static and homogenous identity, but a porous one that is constantly being transformed and is transforming the space around it. On the one hand, this thesis engages with the Centre's dominant discourse on 'Chineseness' as equating Chinese culture with nationality and promoting a homogenising vision of what it means to be Chinese in legislation (judiciary power), with the political goal of cultivating citizens who are loyal to the CCP. On the other, I also tried to capture parallel narratives from individual subjects, like education officials, kindergarten principals, teachers, and parents. When asked what Chinese identity and culture mean to them, most interviewees showed a remarkable degree of convergence in mirroring the Centre's essentialist and stereotyping narrative, the most common answer being 'pride,' 'loving the motherland,' and having 'an outstanding traditional culture.' Even in Public3 kindergarten, which is affiliated with a leading Shanghainese university and a third of respondents have a PhD, informants did not find using such stereotypes problematic. It is important to note, however, that "*identity is always constructed by reference to others*" (Cohen 1985:95), so respondents could have also been influenced by the fact that they were engaging with a foreigner – a clear 'other,' and constructed simple explanations to facilitate my understanding.

Also, the three observed public kindergartens are some of the best in Shanghai and cater mostly to a segment of the population that identifies as 'old Shanghainese' (*laoshanghai ren*), and came across very proud of their regional identity. Especially in the case of Public2 kindergarten, the focus on disseminating Shanghainese culture was notable everywhere, from the art and books displayed in corridors and in the classrooms, to the staff speaking Shanghainese amongst themselves and Shanghainese classes being offered to the children. The informants I spoke to did not see a clash between promoting regional identities and the official discourse forging a homogenous vision of 'Chineseness.' On the contrary, Shanghainese identities fluidly coexisted with the stereotypical understanding of 'Chineseness,' both being mutually enforcing. In my interactions with parents and teachers, possibly because I was clearly a *wai guoren* (外国人) they invariably had a strong sense of being 'Chinese.' In line with what Gamble (2002) experienced himself whilst in Shanghai, this self-designation that was not used amongst themselves, as native-place identity still plays an important role in identity perception as a status-symbol – having a Beijing or Shanghai hukou, for example, means privileged access to a plethora of public goods other Chinese citizens do not have. Overall and also reflecting Gable's findings, "*being Shanghainese is being Chinese with Shanghainese characteristics*" (2002:112).

I made the decision to include ethnographic descriptions of the celebration of China's National Day and Spring Festival because I wanted to share with the reader the main rituals through which patriotism and traditional culture are taught to the children and performed for

the parents and the Centre, information rarely accessible to people who do not live in China or read Mandarin. The week-long national day event had similar activities, like children putting together China collages showcasing iconic landscapes and cultural elements, decorating the kindergarten, dressing up in red or traditional clothes and waving the national flag, and marching and singing patriotic songs. The entire month of September was permeated by socialist rhetoric and the children were taught that there is no distinction between the Party and their motherland, that loving their country means loving their leaders and the Communist Party. The purpose of these converging patriotic narratives shaping this holiday for the Centre, the parents and the children was best expressed by a November 2017 WeChat post by Public3 kindergarten, the embodiment of “*General Secretary Xi’s emphasis that it is necessary to raise the cultural confidence of the nation’s children [by having them] directly experience pride and self-confidence for growing-up in Great China, under the guidance of the Party*” (Public3 WeChat post, November 2017).

My observations of Chinese New Year-related events showed that all the teachers put a lot of effort into promoting related customs and traditions, especially about the importance of family reunion and filial piety. The majority of K2 children, between five and six years of age, were already familiar with its core traditions and, by observing their interactions I could see that the overall message of the importance of taking pride in being Chinese and the excellence of Chinese culture, disseminated both at kindergarten and at home, had been effectively internalised. Accordingly, throughout Space2, senior class children could recount the stories of the monster Nian, the Door Gods or the Chinese zodiac and had all performed the same rituals of the CNY family dinner and receiving lucky money.

Overall, all three kindergartens organised similar events, in line with the expected rites for celebrating the Spring Festival, there being no difference in the scale or activities of 2018 compared to previous years. Hence, the Chinese New Year was unaffected by the 19th National Congress and, as the most important holiday in China it remained the grandest celebration of the school year in all three public kindergartens, situation that contrasted with the two observed private kindergartens, the latter emphasising Western celebrations.

As follows, the children learned about the origins of this festival, read spring couplets, practiced their calligraphy, cooked traditional food, participated in lion and dragon dances and welcomed the Year of the Dog with a group lunch (symbolising the traditional family dinner). While the variety of activities centred on Chinese folklore was expected, I was impressed by Space2’s dedication to promoting China’s cultural heritage and the pride both parents and teachers took in organising the events, as well as in explaining the significance of various myths and customs to the children. Compared to Christmas, for example, the closest equivalent I could find in ‘Western’ culture, my observations assess the Spring Festival to be much less commercial and retaining many traditional elements. Also, the parent questionnaire indicated negligible difference in how families celebrated at home or what cultural elements were taught by the parents. Moreover, in Public1 and Public2 kindergartens the parents were very involved in not just taking part in festivities, but also in organising the festival and teaching special lessons.

Chapter 6: Counter-Discourses from Public Kindergartens: The Space-in-Between Whispers Back

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I established that top public kindergartens in Shanghai are aligned with the Centre's discourse in promoting socialist and traditional Chinese values, actively working to cultivate patriotic citizens after the 2010 Education Reform. The current chapter looks at Space2's counter-discourses disseminating 'Western' culture. More specifically, I shed light on forces of negotiation, and, to a minimal extent, resistance generated through the celebration of Christmas and Halloween, which globalisation made popular world-wide. I hence assess the interplay between globalisation, narrowed down to these two holidays, and the dominant discourse promoting moral education shaped by Xi Jinping Thought.

My analysis, based primarily on interviews and ethnographic data, highlights the creative ways the Space-in-Between employs to circumvent official censorship and continue celebrating foreign holidays by projecting a patriotic image in both kindergarten documents (like overall curricula and weekly lesson plans) and on social media, where they exalt the eminence of Chinese culture and Party ideology. The main tactic, which my fieldwork shows to have been successful thus far, is to downplay the celebration of 'Western' festivals by not including them in online posts, or by relabelling and mixing them with Chinese elements – so constructing a Sinicised version of global popular culture festivals.

In terms of the spaces of analysis this chapter operates with, they are the same as those in the previous chapter, namely the Centre-Beijing and its reaching arms, the Shanghai (SEB) and local education bureaus (Space1.1), and Space2, public kindergartens and their hierarchical structure of principals, teaching staff and parents. I situate public kindergartens on the Space-in-Between the homogenising power of the Centre and the Margin of private kindergartens because they are allowed to use a 20-30% original curriculum infused with Western cultural elements.

The overarching questions I engage with are, *how do global forces*, expressed through the dissemination of 'Western' cultural content, *and local ones*, generated by Space2, *interact* in the case studies of Halloween and Christmas, and *why this negotiation process 'translates' 'Western' festivals into narratives imbued with Chinese characteristics*. In other words, I look at how the observed public kindergartens are using hybrid curricula shaped by official guidelines and content (following *the 2012 ECE Curriculum Guidelines* and the SEB-approved *Learning Activities* teachers manual), disseminating the core socialist values and traditional Chinese culture, but also covertly including 'Western' cultural elements in their special curricula, in a political milieu that is increasingly averse to non-Chinese culture (Fish 2017). My research sheds light on the ingenuity of the Space-in-Between in circumventing the Centre's demands for an exclusive Chinese-driven curriculum, which is analysed in detail in the sections on 'performing Halloween and Christmas,' respectively. Hence, the two case studies intertwine the analysis of the Centre's directives regarding the exclusion of 'Western' cultural elements from public kindergarten activities, the kindergarten management's responses, as well as the parents as agents of globalisation who choose to celebrate these two holidays at home.

My informants working in public kindergartens do not see any ideological clash between celebrating Halloween and Christmas and patriotism, arguing they are not going against the Centre's dominant discourse of cultivating patriotic citizens. However, while the three principals emphasised political correctness during our interviews, explaining that the two Western festivals are celebrated because of their entertainment value for children and that they

are doing nothing forbidden, their actions contradict their statements. I found very little mention of these activities on their official WeChat accounts, unusual behaviour for elite kindergartens in Shanghai, where the norm is to increase one's prestige by constantly advertising one's achievements on social media. In line with this train of thought, I posit these 'Western' festivals are the outcome of negotiation with the Centre, while the cultural content they disseminate to the children constructs subtle spaces of resistance and that kindergarten management does not realise the impact this exposure has on the children's identity-formation. While taking this under-researched topic further would be a great addition to the body of literature on early education in China or child psychology, the current thesis limits itself at analysing management, teaching staff, and the parents, with the children's engagement captured in vignettes from observation days.

In 2017, only Public1 kindergarten, one of the leading demonstration kindergartens in Shanghai and with an established international stream, held both Halloween and Christmas activities, with the latter not officially celebrated by the Chinese stream. In an interview from March 2018 Teacher Yun (PU1K9), the coordinator of the international classes (enrolling only foreign passport holders), insisted that the local stream had not been directly exposed to Christmas because it is not a Chinese festival. However, my observation of Christmas day refuted her claim, as I witnessed a Chinese senior class have a lesson about this festival, which I discuss at length in a separate section below.

Officially, Public2 did not celebrate either festival, proudly advertising its China-centric curriculum instead. This kindergarten, which I perceive as the most ideologically aligned with the dominant discourse, vigorously argued against the dissemination of any Western festivals. The explanation for Vice-principal Hua's (PU2K13) inflexible discursive positioning is that this level one kindergarten wants to achieve the rank of demonstration kindergarten and is thus promoting a patriotic public image that would garner the SEB's support: "*first of all, we must meet the needs of our country and the SEB's requirements for first ranking kindergartens.*" Nevertheless, they did in fact hold a kindergarten-wide celebration on 29th December 2017, which I observed and define as a hybrid between Halloween and Christmas. Under the official caption of a "New Year Dress up Parade," Public2 invited all the parents and children to come to kindergarten in costume, with the K2 children I was observing exchanging gifts in front of a trimmed Christmas tree. Thus, the children had fun wearing mostly Disney-inspired costumes, ate candy and listened to Christmas carols in a kindergarten decorated with Christmas trees and Father Christmas and angel garlands. Disguised as a New Year party, this activity contained rituals that are clearly rooted in the two Western festivals of Halloween and Christmas.

In Public3 only Halloween was officially celebrated in 2017, Principal Lin (PU3K16) explaining her decision by saying it is part of popular culture and has no religious meaning, so it does not contravene Space1's recent rhetoric inhibiting Western festival celebrations in the public space, which I posit became more acute after the 19th National Congress. Moreover, K2 Teacher Wen (PU3K17) emphasized that the kindergarten uses its own Chinese curriculum, and that they don't have any special lessons about Christmas, as "*it's not recommended to celebrate foreign festivals nowadays or put too much emphasis on them.*" According to her, this had been the trend in Shanghai for some years already, but after the *shijiuda* (十九大) an official report was published and distributed by the SEB emphasising that kindergartens should focus on Chinese festivals, directive she fully embraced:

"We have such beautiful Chinese festivals that we have no need to teach our children about festivals that are celebrated by foreigners. We have the Chinese New Year and the Double Ninth Festival, we follow our ancient tradition of the 24 solar terms calendar, and they represent the spirit of our nation a lot better [than Western festivals]" (PU3K17).

Looking at the parental dimension of the kindergarten hierarchy, where parents lack agency within the constraints of Space2, the parent questionnaires revealed that the majority

choose to enrol their children in extracurricular lessons where they can learn English and the Western cultural dimension that comes with the process of learning a foreign language (Murphy 2009). Consequently, this chapter also engages with the parents of senior class children as actors exerting their capacity for agency in deciding what their children are learning, not by directly going against the official kindergarten curriculum, but by circumventing it when opting for extracurricular lessons for their children. As explained in the previous chapter, within the constraints of the Space-in-Between, parents are more than happy to dance to the tune of the kindergarten principal and classroom teachers (ME5) in terms of the curricula and teaching patterns, being grateful to have secured a place in these elite kindergartens.

Within the current educational milieu in Shanghai, extracurricular classes are the parents' only available option for going around the 'anti-subject learning' regulation enforced by Space1.1 in legislation like the Shanghai Three-Year Action Plans (STYAPs), which forbids all kindergartens from teaching primary school-level subjects like Maths, English or Chinese. During my one year of fieldwork I discovered that many parents opt for their children to not attend kindergarten between one and three days per week in the second term of K2, instead enrolling them in private lessons that prepare them for primary school.^{lxxxiii} From my interviews, most K2 teachers and kindergarten management are well aware of the parents' actions and support their decision because it increases the children's chances of getting into a good school, the first step to setting them up for success in a country shaped by numeric capital (Woronov 2016).

Consequently, this chapter briefly addresses a key ECE provision labelled 'anti-subject learning,' present in every STYAP since 2008 and the parents' response to it. Space1.1 wholeheartedly endorses this policy, motivating that it was put in place to safeguard the children's right to a happy childhood, a way for the SEB to "*maintain control over a child's key developmental and educational needs*" (EO3). This piece of legislation has been playing a vital role in shaping kindergarten curricula in both public and private kindergartens (but public kindergartens especially), of interest for the researcher being English lessons. I argue that teaching a foreign language is an excellent means to disseminate Western cultural content to young children, and that English is not part of the SEB-approved ECE curriculum because the Centre's goal is to build patriotic citizens, not expose young children to what it sees as a competing culture. Since Space1's approach to ECE teaching patterns since 2010 heavily favours using games and play, and the contemporary celebration of Halloween and Christmas is extremely child-friendly, there should be no reason to prevent kindergartens from including them in their annual festivities but for the same political rationale, which targets the promotion of values and citizenship education.

The idea to look at the celebration of local/ Chinese and global/North American festivals to capture instances of how Chinese and 'Western' culture are being perceived, reshaped, and disseminated in a Chinese kindergarten setting, as well as in children's homes, was inspired by reading Bruce Forbes' *America's Favourite Holidays: Candid Histories* (2015). The author successively looks at Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, Halloween, and Thanksgiving as ideal performative events to observe and understand modern popular culture, instances where religion and culture mix in ever-changing ways (2015). While I observed that all five major American holidays were celebrated in the two private kindergartens during 2017-2018, as well as in Public1's international stream, I wanted to compare the most representative festivals celebrated in all the selected kindergartens, hence I narrowed down my scope to Christmas and Halloween.

In line with Santino's North American narrative, Halloween is primarily defined an external celebration, with the focus on decorating the exterior of one's house, of children dressing-up and going trick-or-treating in the streets, while Christmas is its opposite, a holiday celebrated around the hearth, with Santa Claus bringing gifts at home and the family celebrating

together (1983: 6). Thus, these two holidays provide a complementary view of mainstream ‘American’ culture dissemination in a kindergarten setting, even though, due to the increased commercialisation of Christmas, it is more accurate to say that both holidays have a strong presence globally, with South East Asia being no exception.

The detailed analysis of the legislative framework targeting ECE and the promotion of socialist and traditional Chinese values in Chapter 4 shows that the Centre’s strategy since 2010 has been to ensure that Chinese children learn to love the motherland and the Party. I identified the 19th NCCCCP as the moment when this nation-wide discourse of cultivating patriotic citizens took on another dimension, namely the purposeful exclusion of any non-Chinese cultural content, especially with religious connotations, Christmas standing out as the festival non grata in the eyes of the CCP (e.g. May 2018; Xu 2018). According to Prof. Zhang (EE7), an ECE expert from a leading university in Shanghai, this shift of the Centre, with a clear message that a Chinese-driven curriculum is superior to all others, and that any Western values or festivals have to be either excluded or balanced by a Chinese component, was made clear for China at large from October 2017 onwards, but my interviews with Space2’s management showed that all three had been aware of and following this directive for 3-4 years already, starting with Xi taking the Party leadership and his rhetoric of strengthening moral education to cultivate people (Tang and Fan 2019).

Despite their discursive alignment with Space1, in reality both Public1 and Public3 kindergartens celebrated Halloween, as well as organised at least one Christmas-related activity. Also, Public2 hosted a New Year party that merged the typical Halloween dress up parade with the Christmas ritual of exchanging gifts under a Christmas tree, but relabelled it a generic ‘party,’ thus devoid of cultural or religious underpinnings.

According to Public1’s Teacher Yun (PU1K9), exposing the Chinese stream to Western culture is allowed as long as it is a spill over effect from the international classrooms and is not part of the official curriculum. The technique this kindergarten used to negotiate with the SEB and circumvent censorship was to use a misnomer for cultural elements that are associated with Christmas. Thus,

“When the international classes celebrate Western holidays, the local ones are not directly involved, but we invite them to learn about them by observing the festivities and visiting the international classes to see their decorations. For example, Christmas, which is now very controversial in China, we have to be careful with. So, what we did was stop using the name Santa Claus or Old Father Christmas (shengdan laoren 圣诞老人) and replaced it with Old Man New Year (xinnian laoren 新年老人), who still brings Christmas gifts to the children and is wearing red clothes. As the New Year is close to Christmas, we combined the two holidays and took out any religious connotation away from Christmas. We must respect each family and keep the balance. So, we told the children about Christmas, let them know some typical stories and characteristics of this festival, without religious stories, of course, but it’s not a big celebration. It’s especially good that it is before the New Year, so it’s easy to celebrate it without any religious connection” (PU1K9).

Meaning is produced at many levels, so I was aware of the ‘storyteller’s’ bias when conducting my ethnographic work and tried to minimise the production of a subjective and reductionist narrative. While I strive for objectivity, the construction of both Halloween and Christmas in the present thesis is generated by a researcher whose personal experience bias is rooted in growing-up in Eastern Europe, in a Greek Orthodox and Catholic home. Moreover, I started living in Shanghai after 2010, when both festivals, but Christmas especially, were taking off in becoming popular festivals in urban China, especially their consumerist aspects of shopping and gift-giving. Over the years, I witnessed their physical manifestation in Shanghai’s public space through shopping malls and restaurants decorated with imposing Christmas trees and lights, as well as a plethora of related activities for children and young people, like haunted

houses and trick-or-treat walks. Thus, I construct Halloween and Christmas celebrations in Shanghai as secular, popular culture products which circulate meaning disconnected from religion. My personal assessment was corroborated by my interviews with kindergarten management and staff, who also describe the two festivals as fun opportunities for the children to exert their agency by dressing-up and sharing gifts among friends.

Chapter 6 is thus structured into two sections, the Space-in-Between's negotiation with and subtle resistance to the homogenising power of the dominant discourse by (1) performing Halloween and (2) Christmas, defined as the two most representative holidays for familiarising children with 'Western,' especially mainstream North American culture (Forbes 2015). Given the word constraints of this thesis I decided to tackle parental agency in circumventing public kindergarten curricula by enrolling children in extracurricular activities, especially English lessons in the Appendices (Table 6.11).

6.2 Performing Halloween: A theoretical grounding

In this section my goal is not to tackle the origin and history of Halloween, but to provide an ethnographic perspective on the celebration of this festival in the three observed public kindergartens. I start from the premise that Halloween is a celebration where "*people incorporate ancient symbolic forms and make contemporary statements with them*" (Santino 1983: 3), meaning that ethnographies of kindergarten celebrations will capture how globalisation is affecting localities in Shanghai. I am using the way Halloween is being celebrated in the United States as the benchmark for my comparison, with 'traditional' activities that target two spheres, decorating the home and decorating the self, the latter by getting dressed-up and taking part in a trick-or-treat activity or a dress up parade. When it comes to the making of decorations for the home, Americans usually embellish their houses with Jack-o'-lanterns, scary monsters and seasonal fruit and vegetables to symbolise the harvest (Santino 1983). The trend of celebrating Halloween is growing rapidly outside the US, with the UK, Germany, Canada, Japan, and even China starting to embrace this holiday. While in Western Europe the night of 31st October is a great opportunity for young adults to wear a costume and party all night, in urban China the elite has started organising Halloween parties for their young children as an expression of globalisation and aligning with international trends (ME5), activities supported by the data collected in my November 2017 parent questionnaires.

I will not take a historical perspective regarding the celebration of Halloween in Chinese kindergartens, but only focus on describing and analysing the related activities that took place in October 2017, the same month hosting the traditional Mid-Autumn Festival. In line with Santino (1983), I look at the celebration of Halloween as a personal statement made either by the children, their parents, their teachers, or any combination of these three actors, in a participatory group situation, the purpose being to see whether they are using any culturally valued or shared symbols. From my observations and parent questionnaires, this holiday is perceived as a Western festival where children have fun by dressing-up and eating candy. Hence, a runway show and going trick-or-treating on kindergarten premises were trademark activities at both Public1 and Public3, the two kindergartens that celebrated this festival. Consequently, I argue that, at least superficially, the popular culture, commercial value of Halloween was successfully disseminated in Space2. Moreover, it spilled over onto the private sphere as well, as over 60% of the surveyed parents said they prepared for Halloween at home, the minimum requirement being buying a costume for their child.

To assess if and how children celebrated Halloween both at home and at kindergarten, I included three related questions in the first round of parent questionnaires collected in November 2017. The questions were also designed to reveal whether there was a connection

between the Halloween-related knowledge disseminated by teachers within the confines of Space2, and what their parents were telling them at home (Table 6.1 below). The children's agency was observed during Halloween-related activities and was expressed in their choice of costume, as well as in their conversations during related lessons and activities.

Performing Halloween is organised in three subsections, the analysis of Public1 and Public3 questionnaires related to this celebration at kindergarten level and at home, followed by how the two kindergartens organised this festival, the latter insight being mostly derived from direct observation of related activities, interviews, and kindergarten social media posts.

6.2.1 Parents' views on Halloween

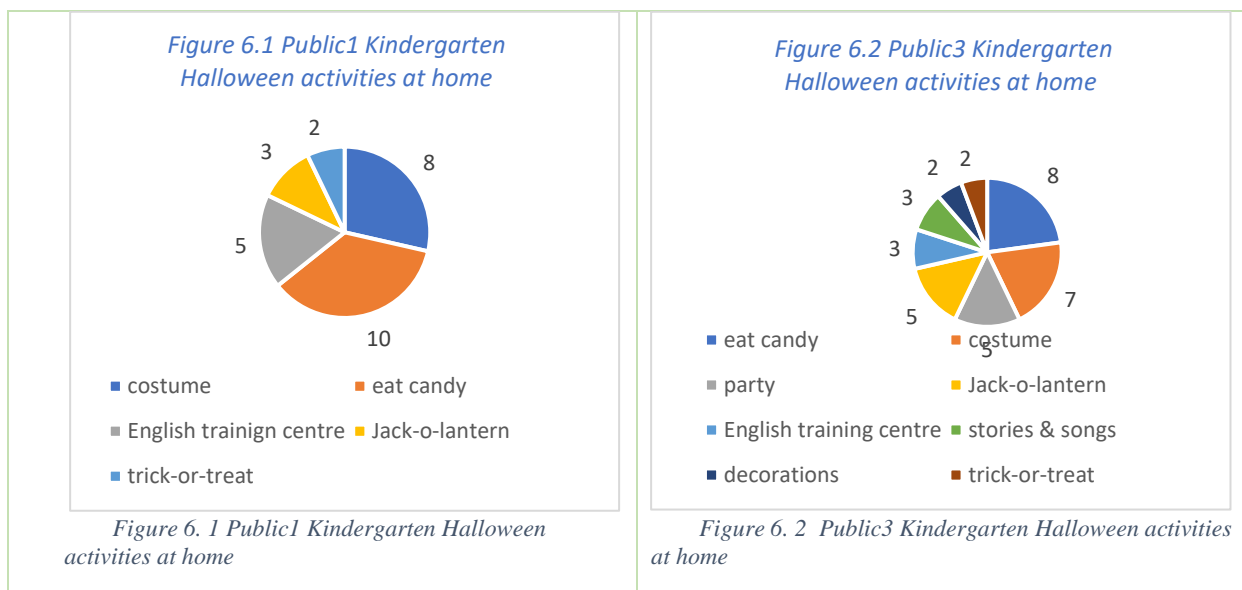
In Public1, the parents' responses regarding the question of how Halloween was celebrated in kindergarten in 2017 were a complete surprise, as 63% of the total sample of 28 respondents said no celebration had taken place that year, even though I observed it myself. One parent went so far as to write that the kindergarten had cancelled Halloween and instead advocated for Chinese festivals only, decision he fully supported because the children are Chinese, not 'foreigners' (*waiguoren* 外国人) (PUB1_QUEST1_03/28). The parents' official narrative was in line with Space1's directives post the 19th National Congress, pushing for more Chinese culture in the public sphere. However, it clashed with my own observations of Halloween being celebrated by both the international and the local stream. During my visit on 31st October, I witnessed the majority of children wearing costumes, the kindergarten overflowing with thematic decorations, Halloween songs filling the corridors and related activities taking place in every classroom. The 37% who confirmed their child had celebrated Halloween in Public1 mentioned three activities, namely dressing-up in the costume of their choice, a 'candy-related activity' and a Halloween buffet. The candy activity referred to the children going trick-or-treating throughout the kindergarten, a classroom at a time, and being given candy by the staff. However, none of the respondents actually used the expression 'trick-or-treat' or any Halloween-specific words.

From the 37 questionnaires collected in Public3, 32% of the parents also denied the kindergarten having organised a special Halloween activity, despite it being extensively covered on the kindergarten's official WeChat account in a November 2017 post, under the title 'Halloween Fantasy Carnival,' which I was also a witness of during my visit on 30th October. This behaviour was consistent with that recorded in Public1, where the majority also provided incorrect information. It is hard to objectively assess the respondents' motivation for their answer, the two most logical interpretations being that a high percentage of parents either did not know what their child was doing in kindergarten or did not wish to 'get the kindergarten in trouble' by making it public they had celebrated a Western festival (despite Public promoting the event online).

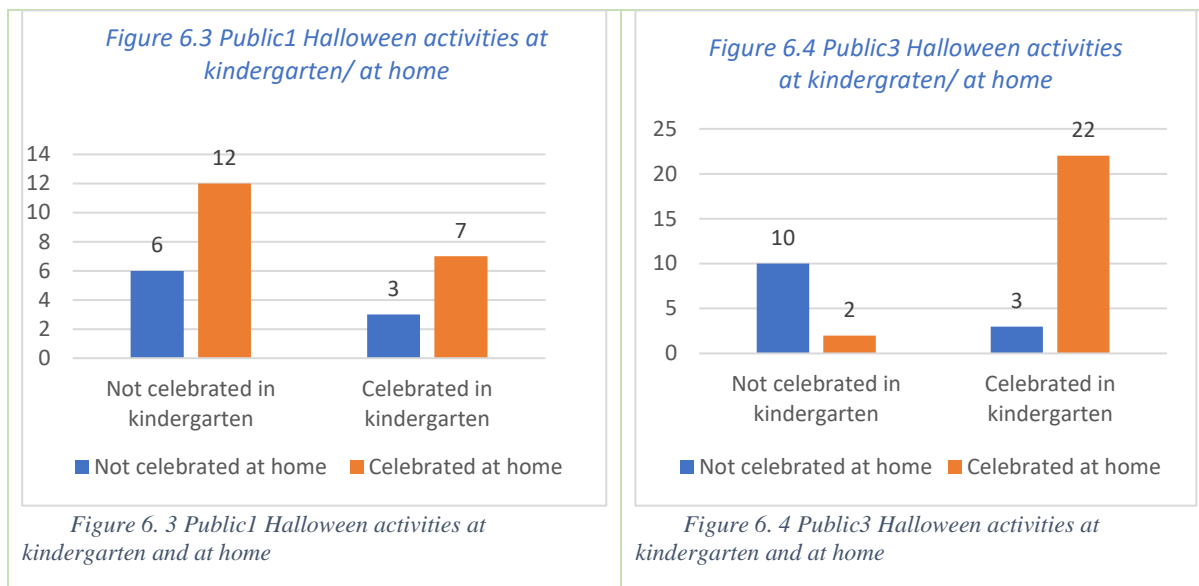
The parents who said that Public3 did not hold a Halloween event because of political correctness explained that "*public kindergartens don't need to celebrate a foreigners' festival, as they should promote Chinese festivals instead*" (PUB3_QUEST1_10/37). The most vehement voice argued that he "*does not agree to the celebration of Western festivals, as they strengthen Western values too much. We have our own Spring Festival, Qing Ming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and so on. The excessive celebration of Western festivals is a bad tendency and should be stopped*" (PUB3_QUEST1_17/37). The 68% who stated that Public3 kindergarten had organised an event mentioned a dress up parade, going trick-or-treating to certain classrooms to get candy from the kindergarten staff, and making a pumpkin-shaped paper lantern. These activities are all covered in related official WeChat posts and are analysed in more depth in a later section, together with my ethnographic notes.

Halloween was celebrated at home by 67% of the respondents in Public1, with most of them buying candy and costumes for their children, taking them to celebrate at their English training centre, making a Jack-o'-lantern and going trick-or-treating on their housing estate or at a local mall (see Figure 6.1 below for activity type and incidence). The latter activity stands out, as it is proof that housing estates and malls in Shanghai organised a Halloween activity in 2017, meaning that this American holiday is becoming part of Chinese public space. This occurrence suggests that entire local communities in Shanghai, especially in affluent neighbourhoods, are actively being shaped by global popular culture trends.

In Public3, 59.4% answered they put together a Halloween-related event at home, as follows: buying candy and organising a candy-related activity (mentioned 8 times), buying a costume (7), making a Jack-o'-lantern (5), having a Halloween party with friends (5), going to an English training centre (3), reading stories and singing songs (3), putting up Halloween decorations (2) and going trick-or-treating (2) (Figure 6.2 below).



Regarding the connection between celebrating Halloween at kindergarten and at home, in Public1 12 out of the 18 respondents who said their child had no related activities in kindergarten prepared something at home (or at a training centre), while the rest argued that this festival is not a Chinese one, and hence it should not be celebrated in China. Out of the 10 parents who confirmed their child did indeed do a Halloween activity in kindergarten, 7 also organised something at home, while 3 did not (Figure 6.3 below). Given that the main event in kindergarten was dressing up, the researcher finds it highly unlikely that these 3 respondents did not buy a costume for their child, as well as candy to take to class. Because children were asked to prepare a costume and bring sweets to kindergarten Halloween seeped into the private sphere. In Public3 there is a strong correlation between Halloween being celebrated at kindergarten through a dress up parade and the holiday also being celebrated at home, as 22 of the parents who said that their child had a Halloween-related activity at kindergarten also organised one at home, especially since they had already bought a costume for their children (Figure 6.4 below).



When asked to give examples about how they explained Halloween to their children, the majority of Public1 and Public3 parents presented it as a Western ghost festival, “a Western festival to commemorate saints,” (PUB1_QUEST1_13/28), “a traditional Western festival where children dress up and go to their neighbours asking for candy,” (PUB3_QUEST1_20/37), with the most radical comment being that “it has nothing to do with Chinese people and should not be celebrated at all” (PUB1_QUEST1_25/28).

In conclusion, the majority of Public1 and Public3 parents celebrated Halloween at home and see it as a Western ‘ghost festival’ similar to the Chinese Zhongyuan (中元節) or ‘Hungry Ghost’ Festival, hence a great opportunity for their children to don the costume of their choice, eat candy, make Jack-o’-lanterns and go trick-or-treating, which are the quintessential characteristics of this festival. Moreover, from my discussions with senior class teachers, this fun-driven narrative was also disseminated within the observed kindergartens and the reason why Space2 continues to organise Halloween, despite it not being a traditional Chinese festival.

The next section sheds more light on what the celebrations of Halloween entailed in Public1 and Public3 kindergartens, as Public2 did not organise an event per se, the latter opting to rebrand it and thus incorporate a dress up parade into their New Year Party (event analysed in the *Performing Christmas* section). While both kindergarten events are analysed below, more detailed ethnographic observations from my visits, as well as pictures, are available in the Appendices.

6.2.2 Public1’s ‘spill over’ Halloween

The celebration of Halloween in Public1 kindergarten had both teaching staff and children dress up and take part in a trick-or-treat activity, with the whole kindergarten, especially the international stream classrooms, being decorated thematically. However, this event was not mentioned on the kindergarten’s official WeChat account in either the Mandarin or English versions, the spotlight being taken by the Double Ninth Festival that had been celebrated the previous month. Thus, on social media, the kindergarten made the decision to emphasise its dissemination of traditional Chinese festivals, conforming with Space1’s discourse promoting moral education. This indicates that, if the kindergarten’s public image remains aligned with the Centre, there is room for negotiation when it comes to celebrating foreign festivals.

Moreover, Halloween was a full-day event only for the international classes (which enrolls only foreign passport holders), the local stream children visiting their peers' classrooms to see the Halloween decorations in what I label a 'spill over effect.' Specifically, the Chinese stream did not organise any Halloween activities except for dressing up and going trick-or-treating, as it uses a Chinese curriculum where Chinese and local (Shanghainese) culture are prioritised. Its monthly topic for October, for example, was 'I love my country,' so the children learnt about China and their city, with lessons and activities targeting Shanghai's landmarks and local cuisine. Halloween was mentioned only once in lesson plans, when the children were asked to go to kindergarten wearing the costume of their choice on 31st October.

The October curriculum is a great indicator that even the most experimental demonstration kindergartens in Shanghai still use a mainstream Chinese curriculum for their Chinese stream, in line with Space1.1's requirements (both official and unofficial) and under the watchful eye of local Party branches. According to Principal Deng (PU1K8) and Teacher Yun (PU1K9), Western festivals are only fully celebrated by the international children, not Chinese citizens, as a public kindergarten's main aim is to disseminate Chinese culture and traditions, the 'Chinese heart' mentioned in this kindergarten's motto.

Given the importance of Halloween for the international stream, and the fact that the entire kindergarten wore costumes and went trick-or-treating inside the premises, the fact that Public1 did not cover the event on social media (not even in the English version for the international stream) is strongly indicative of the pressure kindergartens are under to exert self-censorship. I interpret this omission to be deliberate, as the preschool took the conscious decision not to promote any 'Western' culture-related activities in the public sphere, hence conforming with the official discourse and only promoting 'Chineseness.' The same suppression tactic was applied to its celebration of Christmas, which was also not mentioned in any official WeChat posts, even though it was a kindergarten-wide event.

In the senior class I was observing on Halloween, named K2-1, the two teachers, Teachers Wu and Shan, took the children on a walk through the international stream classroom, explaining along the way what some of the decorations meant. For example, Teacher Wu (PU1K10) shared with the class that the spider webs, ghosts, and carved pumpkins were traditional decorations for this festival because they are very scary and keep the restless ghosts that haunt the world on Halloween away, similar to their own Hungry Ghost Festival. She went on to say that the Jack-o'-lantern is a bit like the fireworks from the Spring Festival, which scare the monster Nian away from people's homes. This example illustrates the dissemination of the discourse on Halloween, but also its hybridisation, as the comparison with Chinese culture added a local flavour – so globalisation and localisation at play.

As I was accompanying the children on their trick-or-treating expedition throughout the kindergarten, everyone excitedly holding onto their trick-or-treat bags, I noticed that most of them were wearing Western costumes, with very few children in traditional Chinese clothes. The majority were Western characters, from mermaids, Elsa and Anna from Frozen (still the most popular animation in 2017 Shanghai), princes and princesses, knights, and kings, as well as the beloved Disney characters of Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, and the Little Mermaid, the boys being mostly dressed as Marvel Comics superheroes like Spider-Man, Captain America or the Hulk (Table 6.2 below).

After returning to the classroom, the children had free play time, the ideal opportunity to observe them talking to each other about their respective costumes in Mandarin. They separated themselves into groups, according to the different play areas, and started to admire each other's clothes. I paid most attention to their explanations for why they had chosen a certain costume. For example, a little girl said she was dressed as Elsa because she loved "Frozen" and because Elsa had beautiful white hair and wore a sparkly blue dress. A boy told his friend that he chose

to be Spider-Man because he was cool, as he could easily climb up buildings using his ‘sticky hands.’ In this get-up, he continued, he felt like a superhero and could fight any bad guys.

These conversations suggest that Public1 Chinese stream children are familiar with Western popular culture characters. Moreover, out of over 30 children present that day in K2-1, none was costumed as a traditional Chinese hero or a character from Chinese cartoons. Their choice of costume clearly shows the children’s preference for Western (predominantly American) popular culture, especially Disney and Marvel Comics.

In K2-1 the Halloween activities finished with a catwalk held in the classroom, where the teachers set up a red carpet and invited the children to walk up and down the ‘runway’ in pairs, showing off their costumes to the class. This activity was accompanied by Halloween songs in English, and Teacher Wu took the opportunity to explain to the class yet again that Halloween was a Western holiday where children dress up and receive a lot of candy after saying the phrase ‘trick-or-treat,’ which the class repeated out loud. She also mentioned the reason for the costumes was to scare away the ghosts that come out on Halloween night.

Teacher Wu also shared with me that the children had had a lesson about Halloween a week before the event, and it was given by a foreign teacher from the international stream. During that half-an-hour (the maximum lesson duration as per official regulations), the children had watched some Halloween videos and sang together, then made a paper plate Jack-o’-lantern.

In later observations of K2-1 I realised that only very few of the children understood even basic English, so I am sceptical regarding how much they had actually understood from their Halloween lesson, as it was delivered in English, by a native English-speaker who did not speak any Mandarin. Hence, I argue there was minimal cultural dissemination regarding Western popular culture within the kindergarten beyond a superficial layer of dressing up and eating candy, with both teachers constantly making comparisons with traditional Chinese festivals. Consequently, I posit that the children’s costume choices must have been driven by other influences, the most likely being exposure to Western popular culture at home and/ or during private lessons at English training centres, but that they performed the basic rituals of Halloween, like going trick-or-treating.

6.2.3 Public3’s “Exciting carnival of friendship”

The political climate surrounding the 19th NCCCP, as well as Public3’s affiliation with a famous local university and its implicit ideological alignment with the Centre did not prevent the kindergarten from celebrating Halloween or promoting this event on social media. Principal Lin (PU3K16) did not see it as a controversial decision, arguing that this holiday does not have the religious connotations Christmas has and that it is a popular children’s festival, similar to Children’s Day. She explained that her kindergarten celebrates Halloween because, despite it not being a Chinese holiday, it is an excellent opportunity for children to dress up and have lots of fun, which is in line with the kindergarten’s teaching philosophy of encouraging play and nurturing the children’s freedom of expression. Hence, this festival is an ideal outlet for the children’s creativity, as they are given the agency to choose their own costume and express their personality and preferences during the kindergarten runway show, as well as the organised activities. Teacher Wen (PU3K17) added that she does not believe celebrating Halloween disseminates a message that is in dissonance with the Beijing-driven request for moral education permeating kindergarten activities. Moreover, both she and Teacher LinLin (PU3K16) were fully aware of the recent political milieu that is discouraging public preschools from promoting Western culture, point that is discussed at length in the *Performing Christmas* section below.

I observed the kindergarten-wide Halloween celebration during the entire morning of 30th October 2017 and, compared to Public1, this kindergarten had a much more subdued display of decorations, the only space specifically adorned being the auditorium. The latter was decorated with pumpkins, spiders, ghosts and witches, and thematic songs were being played on a loop. Moreover, most of the teachers were dressed up as witches, or at least had a witch hat on and a matching cape. Principal Lin (PU3K16) said that she made sure to buy enough witch costumes for all the teachers, as well as plenty of extras for any children who might arrive wearing regular so no one would feel left out, evidence of her commitment to this activity.

Regarding the teachers, Teacher LinLin (PU3K16) shared that she did not hold a formal lesson on Halloween because she did not know much this festival. Moreover, she stressed the importance of presenting this holiday as simply ‘a fun day’ to both the children and the parents, devoid of any religious or deeper cultural significance. Accordingly, she did not explain anything about the origins or meaning of this holiday except for telling the children that it is a “*foreign holiday where children dress up and eat candy,*” (Observation, 30. Oct. 2017) a basic explanation compared to what the Public1 teachers told their class. Moreover, neither she nor Teacher Wen made any comparisons with similar Chinese festivals, like the Hungry Ghost Festival.

As for the children’s behaviour, the senior class I was observing went trick-or-treating throughout the kindergarten, repeating the English phrase ‘trick-or-treat’ each time they asked for sweets. However, no one told them what the phrase meant, so its cultural significance was lost on them. This iconic Halloween activity took the children to designated places on campus, where costumed teachers, staff and a few volunteer parents gave them candy. The main activity was a runway show in the auditorium.^{lxxxiv} Other activities included making candy out of colourful playdough, drawing their favourite costume, and voting for the best outfit. Moreover, they had a selection of games at their disposal, like making a Halloween puzzle, taking part in a pumpkin-rolling race, and making googly-eyed monsters. After returning to their classroom, the children played freely and shared the candy they had received. Similar to Public1, they spread-out in small groups to designated play areas and spent the time talking about their costumes and why they had chosen them. I also observed a group counting their candy, bragging who had more and trading between them.

This Halloween event was extensively covered on the kindergarten’s WeChat account, as management was extremely proud of this activity and did not see a problem with promoting it online. The published content is consistent with my observations and presents Halloween as “*an exciting carnival for children, where the little ones can express their friendship for one another during a happy Halloween party*” (WeChat post, Nov. 2017). The kindergarten emphasized this was a great opportunity for the children to have fun parading in their costume of choice, to learn about the values of friendship and sharing, as well as for the parents to get involved as volunteers and enjoy this day with their offspring. The posted pictures depict happy little princesses, witches, wizards, and Marvel superheroes carrying pumpkin-shaped bags and having a blast, no different from how Western children would celebrate. Table 6.3 [below](#) contains a detailed schedule of Public3’s Halloween activities and is additional proof that this kindergarten, the same as Public1, disseminated a narrative of Halloween as an international festival where children wear costumes, eat sweets and play lots of games with pumpkins, spiders and witches, reinforcing that this festival has become a global phenomenon.

The next part discusses the celebration of Christmas or activities containing related rituals and symbols in all three kindergartens, where I again look at four actors, kindergarten principals, senior class teachers, parents, and children to assess how Christmas narratives are disseminated and internalised within Space2.

6.3 Performing Christmas: A theoretical grounding

“Christmas is what we have made it to mean, living in a particular culture in a particular historical moment” (Whiteley 2008: 14). As the celebration of Christmas has been increasing in popularity in China, especially in urban spaces, it has also come under the scrutiny of the Centre, who I posit is currently seeing it as a two-fold danger. First, as a popular culture product of Americanisation, it is a competitor to socialist values, while as a child-friendly ‘Western’ festival it is as a worthy competitor to the Spring or Mid-Autumn Festivals in gaining children’s affections. Thus, the regime sees the increasing popularity of foreign festivals as directly threatening the preservation of ‘outstanding traditional Chinese culture,’ when in reality this was never a zero-sum equation, a clear-cut decision to celebrate only ‘Chinese’ culture or only ‘Western’ culture. As globalisation is constantly transforming localities, people in China are celebrating their own version of Christmas, while people in the UK, for example, are performing their own interpretations of Chinese New Year rituals. What I observed in these elite preschools was cultural syncretism processes where parents and teachers added their own interpretations to Halloween and Christmas, as well as many K2 children being unable to differentiate between ‘Chinese’ and foreign holidays.

In this section I focus on assessing its manifestation in Space2, using ethnographies of its celebration in all three kindergartens - despite all three preschools officially denying having organised any related events - complemented by parent questionnaires showcasing what the urban Chinese understand to be Christmas rituals and how they celebrated this festival in 2017. The third dimension is based on insight from interviews with kindergarten management and staff. My goal is to find evidence of the Centre using its homogenising power to discourage kindergartens, both public and private, from celebrating Christmas, as well as validate my hypothesis that public kindergartens resist by covertly celebrating this festival, “whispering back” by rebranding it as a New Year activity or not mentioning it in lesson plans or official WeChat posts.

At the start of my fieldwork in October 2017, my assumption, based on having lived in Shanghai for many years, was that urban Chinese children and their parents were familiar with mainstream, iconic elements associated with Christmas, especially visual ones, as well as the ritual of gift-giving and a family meal, but not its religious dimension as celebrating the birth of Jesus or its message of spreading compassion and peace. The only association between Christmas and ‘world peace’ in terms of an ideological discourse that I noticed during my observations was the use of the term *ping’an ye* (平安夜) for Christmas Eve, which means ‘silent/ peaceful night’, with the character ‘安’ (*an*) meaning peace. The data collected through the parent questionnaires, as well as my ethnographic work validated my argument, namely that parents and children dissociate Christmas from its religious dimension but share its global discourse of family fun. Thus, 85% of respondents celebrated Christmas in 2017, with 59% of the entire sample celebrating at home and 26% outside the home only. Moreover, none of the respondents are Christians and only 10 individuals (12%) mentioned the festival’s religious meaning as celebrating the birth of Jesus.

To better define Christmas culture, I use Sheila Whiteley’s 2008 collection of articles, *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture*, where the holiday is assessed from different perspectives that capture contemporary constructs of ‘family’ and ‘community.’ According to the author’s American narrative, the cultural value of a ‘traditional Christmas’ relies on the trimmed Christmas tree, Santa Claus in a reindeer-pulled sled, as well as colourful gifts and stockings by the fireplace, all wrapped-up in a peaceful atmosphere of family reunion, with carols in the background (2008). It is these rituals that have been disseminated all over the world, making Christmas “the global festival” (Miller 1995: 5).

However, the Communist Party, spearheaded by Chairman Xi, has been advocating for more traditional culture in the public space, its dominant discourse focused on the systematic suppression of religion, with Christmas being perceived as the Christian festival par excellence, whose dangerous ideological influence over the Chinese people must be stopped (New York Post, 2018). According to Prof. Liu (EE6), because Space1 does not look at this festival as simply a commercial one, but as a manifestation of Christian beliefs, it has begun to limit its dissemination, fearing its assimilation into local urban rituals. Even in Shanghai, where Christmas decorations in shopping malls have been ubiquitous since the early 2000s, I noticed them taking on a more syncretic form after 2017, promoting ‘a different kind of Christmas’ where traditional iconography is mixed with Chinese elements. For example, in 2018 a 15-metre Christmas tree in Pudong district was decorated with cultural elements from the Forbidden City (Shanghai Bendibao 2018).

In January 2017, the State Council issued *Guidelines to Preserve China’s Traditional Culture*, an international cultural revival project that aims to significantly increase the influence of Chinese traditional culture by 2025. Professor of Chinese studies Guo Yingjie, from the University of Sydney, commented that the current country-wide climate is driven by a “culturally conservative ethos [...] that has definitely been encouraged by the central Party-state,” which may lead educators and officials to be wary of disseminating Western festivals that might be perceived by the Party as “*de-Sinification or promoting Western culture*” (New York Post 2018).

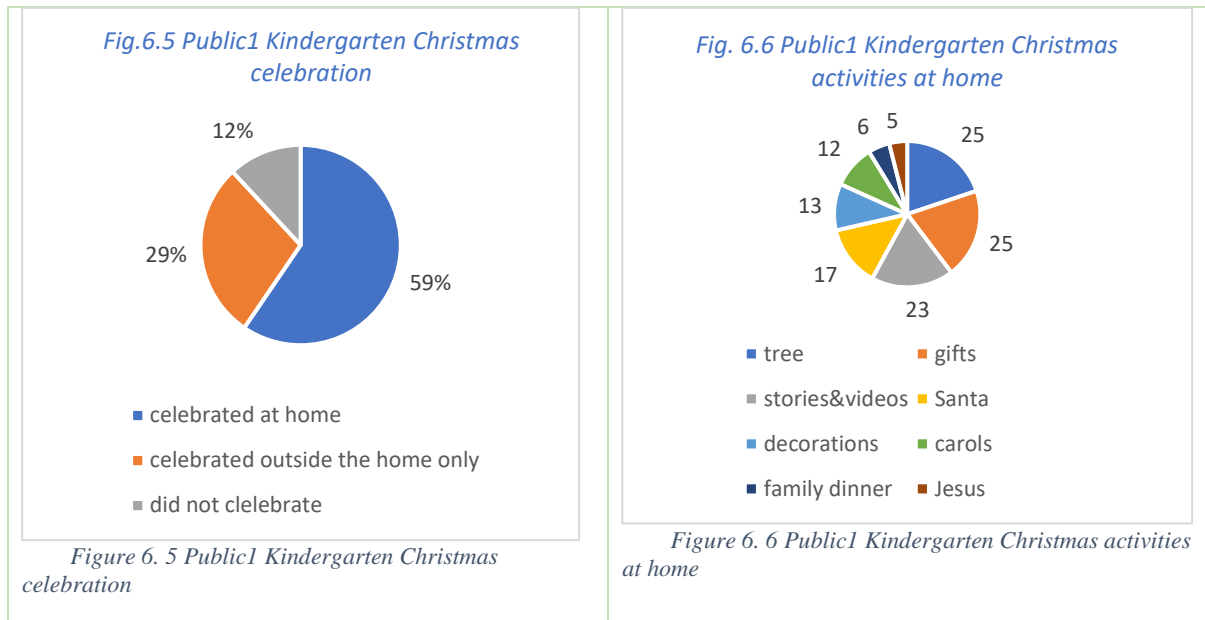
However, China is a country where people are used to circumventing the Centre’s strict regulations by finding loopholes and working around the system, constantly negotiating with the dominant discourse (e.g. ME5; EE6). For example, to hold a Christmas party that would have otherwise been cancelled, the student union from a famous Shanghai university replaced the name ‘Christmas’ with ‘New Year’ in their activity proposal, as well as changed the original date of 25th December (New York Post 2018). The same name-changing approach was used in both private kindergartens I observed, while Space2 officially aligned with the Centre and said it did not celebrated Christmas in the local streams. All three public kindergartens made sure to hide Christmas-related activities on their official WeChat accounts, even though they actually held at least one Christmas-related activity. As described in detail in the next chapter, in the two observed private kindergartens the event took place under the name ‘Winter Concert’ and ‘New Year Festival’ respectively, with both principals making sure that the festivities exhibited a balance between Christmas-related performances and Chinese ones. Private1 kindergarten went so far as to include a patriotic performance, complete with children dressed as soldiers parading with flags and singing a patriotic song.

Below I discuss how urban Chinese parents resisted the Centre’s censorship of Christmas by celebrating at home and at training centres and malls in December 2017, relying on data collected in March 2018 in the second round of parent questionnaires from Public1 (42 respondents) and Public3 (39 respondents).

6.3.1 Parents’ views on Christmas

Public2 kindergarten did not allow me to distribute any kind of parent questionnaire, turning down even a multiple-choice format, but the other two public kindergartens consented to two rounds, with the prerequisite that the principals get to see the questionnaires first and approve all my questions. As they both denied celebrating Christmas officially, I could not add the question “How did your child celebrate Christmas in kindergarten?” as I had done with Halloween. Hence, I could only include questions related to its celebration at home, as well as outside the kindergarten (Table 6.4 [below](#)).

In Public1 I collected a total of 42 questionnaires, 88% confirming they celebrated Christmas in 2017 (Figure 6.5 below). All the respondents who mentioned trimming a Christmas tree at home, a ritual I define as quintessential for this celebration, were counted as having celebrated Christmas within the private sphere, of which there were 59% of the total (25 respondents). An additional 29% performed Christmas by taking their children to a festive dinner or to an English training centre or mall which organised a Christmas party, and also exchanged gifts, but did not organise anything special at home.



To get a better understanding of how families celebrated at home, I asked the respondents to detail what activities they organised, with 25 mentioning trimming a Christmas tree and giving gifts to their children. Also, I created the broad category of ‘stories and videos’ because I wanted to make the distinction between this general and implicitly ambiguous answer 23 respondents gave, and the specific words ‘Santa,’ ‘decorations’ (like stockings, wreaths, garlands), ‘carols,’ ‘family dinner,’ and telling their children Christmas is a religious holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus. This open question aimed at seeing if urban Chinese families are familiar with core Christmas rituals, and their specific answers with Christmas-related terminology showcased in the figure above confirm they are (Figure 6.6 above).

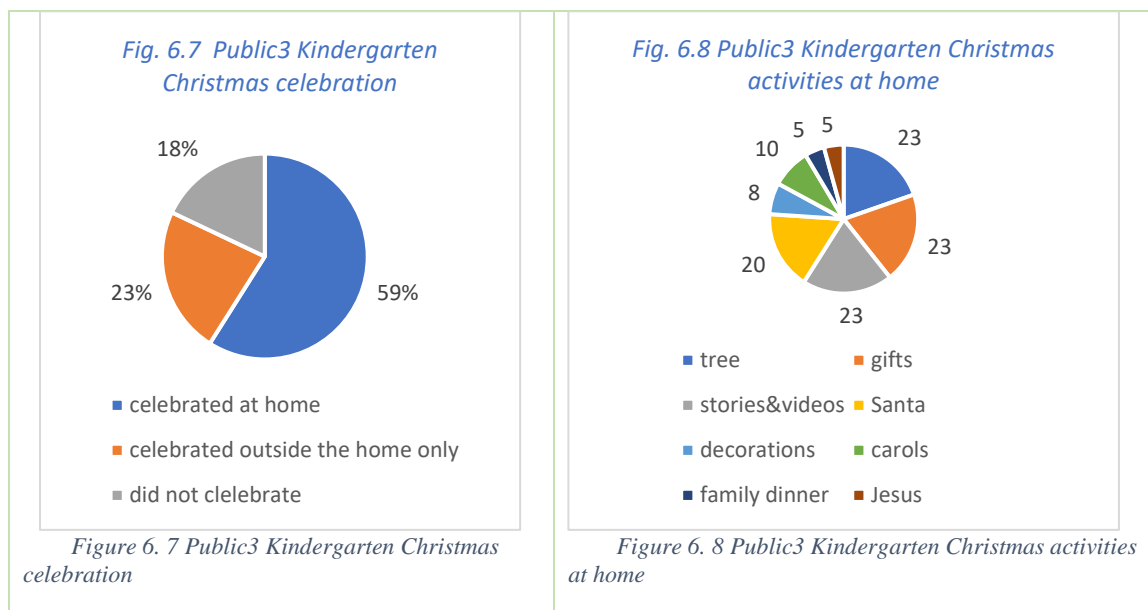
When asked what they thought of this festival, the majority said it was a Western festival that children enjoy celebrating because of the gifts, decorations and stories about Santa and his reindeer, again exhibiting their knowledge of this festival. Most respondents also said that they see nothing religious about the way it is constructed globally, as it is about ‘fun’ (8 respondents), ‘happy times and joy’ (5), sharing, gratitude and warmth (5), as well as the Western equivalent of the Chinese New Year (7), so a holiday about the family coming together and “a moment to make good wishes” (PUB1_QUESTION2_37/42).

Regarding the Christmas narrative they disseminated to their children, while 5 parents did mention that Christmas has religious roots, most did not, only focusing on having family fun by decorating a Christmas tree and telling stories about Santa Clause bringing gifts to well-behaved children. Many made the comparison between Christmas and the Spring Festival, calling the first the “Western New Year,” the reference to Chinese culture facilitating the explanation to their children. One parent motivated that they usually celebrate Christmas in their family not because they are religious, but as “it is important to understand Western culture and help children form a global outlook in order to better adapt to globalisation trends”

(PUB1_QUEST2_29/42). Another argued that the easiest way for children to learn about other cultures is to celebrate child-friendly festivals like Christmas, as this “gives [them] the opportunity to experience the West in an age-appropriate manner, a bit like ‘doing culture,’ not just learning about it in English class” (PUB1_QUEST2_22/42).

On the other hand, five respondents were adamant that Chinese people should not celebrate Western festivals, as it is their duty to “respond to the national call ^ _ ^” (emoji in original answer) (PUB1_QUEST2_08/42) and ignore celebrations that are not traditional Chinese festivals, thus “lacking in Chinese flavour” (PUB1_QUEST2_11/42). One parent explained that while he sees Western culture as “a repository with broad horizons and rich knowledge, [she] hopes her child has a Chinese heart and does not blindly value Western culture without respecting traditional culture first” (PUB1_QUEST2_31/42).

Out of a total sample of 39 questionnaires in Public3, 82% of families celebrated Christmas, with 59% of the total sample saying they organised an activity at home, while 23% celebrated outside the home only (Figure 6.7 below), similar percentage as in Public1. Those who celebrated at home reported to have organised the same activities as their counterparts in Public1 kindergarten (Figure 6.8 below). Thus, all 23 respondents bought and decorated a Christmas tree, gave presents to their children, told them stories about Santa Claus and watched related videos. Moreover, 20 specifically mentioned telling their offspring about Father Christmas, while carols, Christmas decorations, having a family dinner and explaining that the holiday celebrates the birth of Jesus were also listed.



Mirroring Public1, Public3 parents described Christmas as an important Western festival defined by ‘family fun,’ ‘joy,’ ‘warmth,’ and ‘peace,’ “a festival as important as the Chinese New Year to the Western world” (PUB3_QUEST2_02/39), as well as “a great opportunity for children to understand European and American culture” (PUB3_QUEST2_35/39). Moreover, five respondents argued that Christmas was a great way to introduce a different culture to children and thus show them the diversity of the world, with one of them advocating that “different lifestyles, different writing systems, different ways of thinking, Chinese and Western cultures need to merge if we are to live in harmony” (PUB3_QUEST2_20/39), while another emphasized the importance of an equal footing between Eastern and Western culture and respect for both (PUB3_QUEST2_25/39). Another respondent underlined that understanding

Western culture is important because, “*when we study Eastern culture seriously and accept traditional influences, we must also learn Western culture and broaden our horizons*” (PUB3_QUEST2_05/39). Few Public3 parents used references from Chinese culture to explain Christmas, comparing it to the Spring Festival and describing it in terms of a family reunion and exchanging gifts, the Chinese equivalent being the lucky red envelopes.

Overall, Public3 respondents were less detailed in their answers than Public1 ones, as well as slightly less interested in celebrating Christmas. Accordingly, 18% did not have any Christmas activity, with the main explanation being that they see no reason to celebrate a festival that is not part of Chinese culture, one respondent stating that s/he considers Western culture to be “*optional and of slight importance for the Chinese, as [we] have an outstanding culture ourselves*” (PUB3_QUEST2_05/39). However, over 80% celebrated Christmas and both taught and exposed their children to quintessential rituals like a trimmed tree, stories of Santa Claus, a family dinner and gift-giving.

The analysis below focuses on Space2’s Christmas activities in 2017, where each kindergarten is looked at separately and by using ethnographic data collected through observations and interviews with kindergarten management and teaching staff. This Western festival was not mentioned on social media, as was the case with the other three analysed celebrations, namely Halloween, China’s National Day and the Spring Festival, the explanation being that the Centre is cracking down on this festival being featured in the public sphere and public kindergartens conformed to the dominant discourse.

6.3.2 Public1’s hybrid Christmas

According to Principal Deng (PU1K8), the Public1 curriculum seamlessly blends Chinese and international values and acts them out in its celebration of both local and international holidays, statement reinforced by its December 2017 calendar (Table 6.5 below). Because of its international stream, the kindergarten celebrates the main Western holidays of Halloween, Christmas and Easter, but it is traditional Chinese culture that holds centre stage for the local stream. The Chinese stream, which is composed of pupils with Chinese citizenship and a Shanghai residence permit, is exposed to these celebrations by visiting the international classes, which are decorated for every Western holiday, and on occasion participating in small activities. Because of this spill over effect Public1 can successfully negotiate with Space1 and continue to perform Christmas.

Responding to Space1.1’s pressure to focus more on promoting Chinese culture while at the same time minimising the proliferation of Western holidays Public1 reached a compromise by adding a Chinese or component to foreign holidays, divesting them of any religious undercurrent and constructing them as fun, popular culture constructs. Moreover, there was no mention of Christmas on the kindergarten’s official WeChat account, all the posts in December 2017 and January 2018 being about traditional Chinese culture, like the significance of the celebrated 24 solar terms - *Heavy Snow*, the *Winter Solstice*, and the *Slight Cold*, as well as the Laba Festival.

To my direct question of whether the kindergarten had adjusted its curriculum on how to celebrate Western holidays after the October 2017 National Congress, Teacher Yun (PU1K9) denied it, saying they had already been asked to limit the local classes’ exposure years prior. In the case of Christmas, Principal Deng (PU1K8) argued that it solved any concerns for connecting this Western celebration to a religious discourse by changing the name ‘Santa Claus,’ which from Mandarin translates as ‘Old Man Christmas’ (*shengdan laoren* 圣诞老人) into ‘Old Man New Year’ (or *xinnian laoren* 新年老人). However, the kindergarten kept the way it has traditionally been celebrating Christmas, with a teacher dressed-up as Father Christmas bringing gifts to each class, and most classes having a trimmed Christmas tree.

However, in the eyes of the kindergarten, they successfully merged the two holidays of Christmas and the New Year and took out any religious connotation. To keep the balance between Chinese and Western culture required by Space1, the local stream teachers introduced Christmas by telling their charges some characteristics of this festival, without turning it into a big celebration. For example, Teacher Yun (PU1K9) emphasized that “*it’s especially good that Christmas is just before the New Year, as it’s easy to celebrate it without any religious connection.*”

During my visit to K2-1 on 25th December (full activities schedule in Table 6.6 below), the festival’s name was only mentioned during Circle Time, as the main lesson of the day was on traffic rules, which shows the secondary importance of this Western celebration for the local stream. Teacher Wu asked the children if they had celebrated Christmas Eve the previous day and then did a short Q&A about its customs. The first Circle Time vignette (Table 6.7 below) is of particular ethnographic interest, capturing the perceptions five-year-old children from well-off Shanghainese families have of Christmas. I only included an excerpt to highlight the hybridisation of this festival via its acquisition of Chinese cultural elements because of its internalisation by Chinese teachers who were not familiar with it, who disseminate a narrative infused with Chinese elements to the children:

Teacher Wu: Everybody knows what Christmas is, right? Did you celebrate Christmas at home yesterday?

Class (all together): We have.

Teacher Wu: How did you celebrate it? Can you give me some examples?

Girl1: Yesterday I went with my family to a friend’s house to play and my mum gave me an apple.

Teacher Wu: Why did she give you an apple?

Class (all together): Because today is Christmas!

Teacher Wu: So what day was yesterday? [Short pause - some children murmur the answer] Yes, very good, Christmas Eve (*ping’an ye* 平安夜), 24th December.

Thus, Christmas Eve is called *ping’anye* (平安夜) in Chinese, which verbatim translates into ‘the evening of peace.’ The name sounds a lot like the Chinese word for ‘apple’ (*pingguo* 苹果), homophones which led to the Chinese tradition of gifting special ‘Christmas apples’ or ‘peace apples’ called *ping’anguo* (平安果). Hence, Teacher Wu both disseminated and reinforced what I consider to be a Chinese interpretation of Christmas Eve to her class, as ‘an evening of peace when peace apples are exchanged.’ Moreover, the fact that Girl1 received an apple as a Christmas gift and none of her peers questioned it indicates that, for these children, Christmas Eve is associated with the exchange of ‘peace apples,’ a completely new Chinese custom rooted in the homophone characters ‘平’ and ‘苹’ (both pronounced ‘ping’) and that is absent in Western tradition.

Teacher Wu then took the children on a tour of an international senior class, telling them the purpose of the activity was to admire the many Christmas decorations.^{lxxxv} Afterwards, she held the second part of Circle Time, inviting the children to share what they had seen. This was a teacher-driven discussion, meant to disseminate to the children what the Chinese teacher perceived to be Christmas traditions and symbols, but mostly to tell them that China also has many great festivals that are on par with it (second vignette in Table 6.8 below). She also wanted to reinforce that this was a Western festival and, as they are Chinese people, they should be proud of their own amazing celebrations.

The children’s answers indicate that they were unable to easily differentiate between a Chinese and a foreign festival. They exerted their agency by naming many Western festivals, which I interpret to be both a consequence to their exposure to the international stream’s

American curriculum, as well as the internationalisation of holidays like Halloween, Christmas and Easter.

Regarding the Centre's crackdown on Western festivals to be celebrated in China, stemming from the government's apprehension towards any religious symbolism permeating the public sphere and because of its apprehension they may displace traditional Chinese culture (New York Post 2018), this research shows that, in the five observed kindergartens at least, there is no reason for Space1 to fear the dissemination of a religious discourse. As follows, Public1 was the only observed kindergarten where the teachers were even slightly interested in connecting Christmas to Christianity, but only because the word 'Jesus' came up in class when Boy5 mentioned it in his answer to Teacher Wu's question on why foreigners celebrate Christmas, saying that "*they [Westerners] celebrate the day Jesus was born.*" In no other kindergarten, even in the private kindergartens' bilingual stream K2 classes I observed, was any religious explanation given.

A week before this event, a foreign teacher from the international stream gave K2-1 a half-an-hour 'informal lesson' on Christmas, where she introduced some easy English words and showed them a few videos of popular carols. Hence, in line with Teacher Wu (PU1K10), while the focus in the Chinese class is on Chinese culture and values, the children also learn about Western traditions from the foreign teachers of the international stream, who visit once a week. However, as I previously argued, most of the local stream children had only a basic knowledge of English, so English-only lessons had a minimal impact in promoting Western culture. In conclusion, Christmas at Public1 had a performative function and was devoid of any deeper religious significance, but also exposed the six-year-olds to all the key rituals associated with Christmas.

6.3.3 Public2's New Year Dress Up Parade: Halloween and Christmas in disguise

As Public2 kindergarten advocates a traditional Chinese curriculum, according to its official narrative (PU2K12; PU2K13) it did not celebrate either Halloween or Christmas, which it sees as clear manifestations of Western culture. However, their New Year Parade on 29th December 2017, which Principal Ling (PU2K12) defined as "*our kindergarten's original and iconic activity,*" can definitely be labelled as performing Western popular culture. As follows, Vice-principal Hua (PU2K13) proudly described the event the principal's brainchild specifically designed to bring parents, children, and teachers together in a dress up activity reminiscent of Halloween, but without its Western, especially religious connotations, as "*no culture can claim monopoly on dressing up and having fun walking down a catwalk showing off your costume.*" She added that its closeness to Christmas provides the perfect opportunity to de-construct Christmas as well, by borrowing the 'gift exchange' ritual, as well as the fun of making decorations and admiring a nicely trimmed Christmas tree (Ibid.). As follows, this kindergarten-wide event saw the children, all wearing the costume of their choice, exchange gifts in front of a Christmas tree present in every classroom because, according to Teacher Mei, "*every child gets excited when receiving gifts, and the Christmas tree is a great background for taking beautiful pictures*" (PU2K15).

I observed the entire New Year Dress up Parade, a half-day activity that is one of the most important of the academic year, especially in terms of promoting the kindergarten locally. Hence, management went all-out in terms of decor, the majority being Christmas decorations, even though Vice-Principal Hua (PU2K13) had previously insisted on no Western holidays or Western symbols being part of the curriculum (see pictures in Table 6.9 below). Teacher Xiao (PU2K14) also shared with me that her K2 class had had no official lesson about Christmas, the only activity being an arts-and-crafts Christmas tree on Christmas Day. Also, she asked the children to each bring a gift to kindergarten for Santa to give to a classmate, using the secret

Santa arrangement, but without calling it so. My observed senior class did not sing any carols or tell any Christmas stories, as “*the children know about Christmas only from their family or if they take extracurricular lessons and we do not teach these things in kindergarten*” (PU2K14). However, the actions of both homeroom teachers contradicted this narrative, as they were wearing Christmas capes and their classroom had a trimmed Christmas tree, garlands, and Christmas tree crafts displayed on the Art Board.

More evidence of Christmas symbols and rituals being disguised in this New Year Parade were the children exchanging gifts in front of a Christmas tree and the group lunch in a common area decorated with a big Christmas tree, wrapped gifts, ‘Merry Christmas’ garlands, with some kindergarten staff wearing Christmas capes (even though others wore traditional Chinese vests, creating an East-West visual balance).

Pertaining to a New Year celebration, among the plethora of Christmas decorations in the inner yard, every class had written their New Year wishes on colourful cards, each unique to every classroom, and they had hung them on selected trees and bushes for their parents to find and read after the parade. The connection with the globalisation of Halloween was evident in the children and parents’ choice of costumes, as Disney characters were heavily represented, from Mickey Mouse to Elsa and Snow White. However, traditional Chinese culture was also showcased by the kindergarten staff, as one female teacher from each classroom was dressed as an ancient Chinese princess.

Before the parade I observed a senior class and listened to the children’s conversations, the one standing out being between three girls who were comparing the Christmas gifts they had received at home, as well as another between a boy and a girl who were debating whether Santa was real or not. These candid, unguided conversations indicate that these children had previous knowledge of Christmas, and that it had not been disseminated by the two homeroom teachers. Moreover, out of the over 30 children present, only two wore traditional Chinese clothing, the majority having opted for Disney and Marvel heroes (full observation notes in Table 6.10 [below](#)).

To assess these children’s knowledge of Christmas, during my next visit days later (3rd January 2018), I asked Teacher Mei to ask her class some questions during Circle Time, without contextualising them whatsoever.

Teacher Mei: What is Christmas? Who can tell me more about this festival?

Boy1: Christmas is an English holiday.

Girl1: Christmas is a holiday for foreigners.

Girl2: Christmas has a Christmas tree.

Girl3: How about Santa? He brings us presents.

Teacher Mei: Very good, so Christmas is about...Santa and presents. Anything else?

Girl4: The Spring Festival.

Girl5: Christmas is also about getting presents.

Boy2: There are also snowmen.

Teacher Mei: Good, snowmen, anything else?

Boy3: And snowballs!

Teacher Mei: Did you get a Christmas present this year?

Class (together): Yes! (they each name their gift)

Teacher Mei: When did you get these nice presents?

Girl1: Christmas Eve.

Girl2: 24. December.

Teacher Mei: Yes, very good. And who brought you these gifts?

Boy1: Santa. I was sleeping and I heard a noise, then I found a chess set in the living-room.

Teacher Mei: Who can tell me more about Santa?

Boy2: He's a fat old man with a beard and wears red.

Girl6: He brings good children presents.

The short vignette above shows that most children were familiar with Christmas as a popular culture festival, understanding it as a non-Chinese holiday where Santa brings them gifts while they are asleep, and families have a Christmas tree. They did not acquire this knowledge from their teachers, but from their home, as Public2 did not teach anything about related traditions. The children could provide less detail on Christmas rituals than their counterparts in Public1, some boys associating it with building snowmen and making snowballs, but I noticed the same general confusion regarding which festivals are Chinese and which have a foreign origin.

6.3.4 Public3's New Year Show rehearsal

According to Teacher Wen (PU3K17) Public3 did not celebrate Christmas because, especially after the 19th National Congress, kindergartens were asked by the SEB to put more emphasis on traditional Chinese culture. However, she explained Christmas to her class as a foreign festival similar to the Spring Festival, where Santa brings gifts to children (Ibid.). She also added that she was sure the children were more knowledgeable than her, as many were enrolled in English training centres and had private English tutors.

The senior class I had been observing since the start of the academic year only organised a small Christmas activity on 25th December, which I missed as I was at Public1. During my visit on 26th December 2017, they were preparing for their New Year Show, one of the most important events of their academic year. There were no Christmas decorations anywhere in the classroom or the kindergarten whatsoever, but, from my chat with Teacher LinLin I found out that the children had made a Christmas tree card to give to their parents the previous day, while listening to carols. Moreover, a dad had volunteered to dress up as Santa and had brought everyone a small present. Thus, while the ritual of Santa bringing gifts and the Christmas tree were performed, this was superficial behaviour, devoid of the children having a deeper understanding of their meaning. Moreover, I look at the making of a card for the parents as a Chinese interpretation of Christmas, namely expressing filial piety through New Year blessings.

According to Teacher LinLin, her class did have a secret Santa activity the previous year, but in 2017 their whole focus was on the New Year Show. To her, "*as Christmas is so close to the New Year and has nothing to do with our culture, I see no point in holding a big celebration about it*" (Observation, 26. Dec. 2017). Public3 prides itself on disseminating traditional Chinese culture, discourse fully embraced by the two homeroom teachers, as they use the 24 solar-term calendar, as well as calligraphy, Chinese music and the Chinese classics in their teaching. Moreover, during my entire observation the children did not mention Christmas at all in their discussions, their sole focus being on the rehearsals for the upcoming show, where they exerted their agency in choosing a performance. Hence, the entire programme featured Chinese culture, both traditional, like playing the pipa (a 4-stringed Chinese lute) and acting out the story of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, and modern, like dance choreographies and sketches.

As I was keen to understand the extent to which these children were familiar with Western festivals, I enlisted Teacher LinLin's help in asking them what their favourite festival was and why, followed by what they knew about Christmas. I especially asked her to order the questions as above, as I did not want her first asking about Christmas to influence the children's answers more than the closeness to Christmas did (this observation took place on 26th December). The majority stated they preferred Western festivals, with Easter and Halloween the solid winners, each with six votes. Out of 24 respondents, only three chose a traditional

Chinese festival, the Spring Festival getting two mentions and the Mid-Autumn Festival one (see vignette in Table 6.11 [below](#)). Also, only two children liked Christmas best, because of its fun atmosphere and gifts. This intriguing conversation shows that there is only a weak correlation between Christmas having been celebrated by 82% of Public3 families that answered my questionnaire (the survey was carried out in two senior classes, one of them being the classroom selected for observation) only one day prior and it being mentioned as the children's favourite festival, which was the answer I was expecting due to temporal proximity.

Regarding the question about their internalisation of Christmas, only a few children cared to answer Teacher LinLin, mentioning the ubiquitous 'tree,' 'presents,' and 'Santa,' namely the global imagery associated with this festival, as captured in the ethnographic excerpt below. Given that the class had listened to and tried to sing Jingle Bells the previous day, it came as no surprise that one girl associated it with this celebration:

Teacher LinLin: When I say Christmas, what is the first thing you think of?

Boy1: Merry Christmas!

Boy2: Christmas presents.

Girl1: Christmas tree.

Boy3: Santa Claus.

Girl2: Christmas reindeer.

Teacher LinLin: Very good. What else do we have?

Girl3: Jingle bells! [answer in English]

Boy4: Cookies.

Teacher LinLin: What are the cookies for?

Boy4: To give to Santa.

Regarding Public3's promotion of this holiday on social media, I found an intriguing WeChat post from the end of February 2018 entitled '*Happy Chinese New Year, Happy New Semester.*' Among short descriptions of how the kindergarten celebrated the Spring Festival, one picture captured a group of children posing in front of a Christmas tree decorated with Spring Festival lucky envelopes, while another portrayed a collage of snowmen, the same Christmas tree, an arts-and-crafts Chinese dragon and the god of wealth, a visual representation which I think beautifully captures the Chinese narrative disseminated by top public kindergartens in Shanghai, where international forces interact with local culture and create something completely unique.

While the two Western festivals discussed above capture Space2 negotiating with the homogenising power of the Centre and the latter's objective of removing Western culture from China, or if not possible, then reshaping it to contain local elements, the last part looks at resistance through parental agency. Within the borders of public kindergartens parents are subjects to the principals' wishes and behave like obedient bodies shaped by disciplinary forces (Foucault 1991), (Hass 1996), but outside these constraints they resist by celebrating Halloween and Christmas at home, as well as by enrolling their Children in extracurricular lessons like English (Table 6.12 [below](#)).

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter highlights how three leading public kindergartens in Shanghai performed Halloween and Christmas in 2017, and how this production of meaning in Space2 was mediated by local cultural practices, [leading to syncretic celebrations](#). The two festivals were chosen as representative for capturing the dissemination of [mainstream North American](#) culture within a

public ECE setting because they are iconic children's festivals (Forbes 2015), as well as very popular activities in kindergartens throughout Shanghai. Within the spatialisation of the Western world, I approached Halloween as a more mainstream, secular celebration (Santino 1983), devoid of any Christian connotations, while I defined Christmas as still retaining a religious significance for Christians, a holy day that marks the birth of Jesus. Despite the increasing commercialisation of Christmas, with its emphasis on excessive consumption, the festival remains an *"inevitable part of the annual life cycle, [...] characterised by traditional rituals"* (Whiteley 2008: 1), like singing carols and hymns, admiring a nativity play, as well as family-centred events like the exchange of gifts and cards and a reunion dinner.

I posited that one of the most notable consequences of the 19th National Congress of 2017 in terms of control over cultural practices has been the Chinese government taking steps to limit the celebration what it defines as 'foreign' holidays, both because of their intrinsic 'otherness' in terms of cultural values, but also religious meaning. As such, Beijing is wary of Christian, but also Muslim implications (like in the case of Xinjiang Uyghurs), these global festivals might have for an atheist country where faith in the Communist Party is the state religion and a quintessential element of what the dominant discourse constructs as homogenous 'Chinese' identity. Thus, Beijing perceives such 'Western' cultural exports as ripe with dangerous ideological undercurrents that are the reason for political accusation and emotive response in China, as seen in the 'crackdown' on Christmas in several cities in 2018. This official anti-Christmas rhetoric has affected the way the festival is being celebrated in all the observed private and public kindergartens. According to Zi Yang, a China expert from Singapore, *"the ongoing local reaction against Christmas is part of the wider sentiment since Xi took power, [where] foreign cultural elements such as Christmas are placed on the chopping block"* (New York Post 2018).

My fieldwork has uncovered that all three observed kindergartens celebrated at least one ritual specific to either Halloween or Christmas, such as a dress up parade, trimming a Christmas tree, or Santa bringing the children gifts, but their official WeChat posts, as well as the terminology used by the kindergartens themselves to describe these activities purposefully underrated their importance within the academic calendar, as well as the foreign cultural dimension they implicitly contain. This technique of disguising these celebrations or downplaying their importance in disseminating 'Western' culture was used, to various degrees, in all three observed public kindergartens, and is a discursive instrument shared with private kindergartens as well. This example shows that even elite public kindergartens do not fully conform with the Centre's requirements in terms of the celebration of 'traditional' festivals only, but that there are spaces of resistance to disciplinary power, where children are exposed to 'other' narratives. Fearing reprisal from local education officials or local Party branches, these experiences of celebrating Halloween and Christmas are 'hidden' on social media, even though they are common knowledge locally. Hence, if Space1 were truly committed to implementing the nationalisation of ECE, it could take a stronger stand on cracking down on these celebrations.

In the observed kindergartens, even though not celebrated officially in either of them, Christmas was constructed around North American visual cues, as the iconography of Christmas included the trimmed Christmas tree and stocking decorations, mainstream carols, cartoons, and related arts-and-crafts, as well as Santa visiting to bring the children gifts. In the case of Halloween, Public1 and Public3 held a kindergarten-wide event, with costumed children going trick-or-treating, but only Public3 covered the activity on social media. In the case of Public2, the kindergarten most ideologically aligned with the Centre and committed to only promoting traditional Chinese culture, I observed the merging of Halloween and Christmas into their iconic 'New Year Dress up Parade,' with kindergarten management going

to great lengths in interviews to construct this event of what I dubbed ‘Disney meets Christmas’ as an original Shanghaiese activity.

The observation of Halloween and Christmas and related activities in the five kindergartens provides insight into how the themes surrounding these festivals are constructed by Chinese teachers in public kindergartens, and by foreign teachers in private ones. Moreover, as a second layer of the analysis, I looked at how they are perceived by the parents and if, and how they were celebrated at home in 2017. The children’s own understanding of these holidays was captured during Circle Time and formal lessons, particularly when I asked all three public kindergarten homeroom teachers to explicitly ask the children what they knew about them.

The ethnographic data, combined with interviews and parent questionnaires show that both festivals share core similarities in both their celebration and the narrative disseminated within Space 2 by the teaching staff, and at home, by the parents. As both subject groups are Chinese and were subjected to the same disciplinary power growing up, and continue to be subjected to Space1’s dominant discourse it makes sense that they have a superficial understanding of both ‘Western’ holidays and that they ‘infused’ them with local cultural elements.

While as a researcher I was mindful of the caveat that collective identities are simply constructs, Chinese informants comfortably produced and used stereotypes like ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Shanghaieseness,’ as well as what being a foreigner meant based on “*differentiation from the collective other*” (Comaroff 1987: 309). Stereotypes of foreigners were deeply embedded in the celebration of ‘Western’ festivals like Halloween and Christmas, where I observed Chinese teachers and parents using oversimplifications of mainstream American rituals to teach the children about how they thought ‘foreigners’ (*waiguoren* 外国人) celebrated, while unconsciously adding a subjective spin to their narratives. Accordingly, the teaching staff and parents described Halloween as the ‘*Western ghost festival where children eat lots of candy*’ and ‘*visit haunted houses,*’ and compared it to the Chinese Zhongyuan (中元節) or ‘Hungry Ghost’ Festival. This activity was a great opportunity to observe the children in their natural element and gauge to what extent they were being shaped by international popular culture trends. As the majority were dressed up as Disney and Marvel characters and ate candy on this occasion, the influence of globalisation cannot be denied. Moreover, Christmas was not introduced to the children as a Christian festival, but following the discourse of an Americanised global phenomenon, where Santa brought children gifts in a reindeer-pulled sled and ate cookies. These findings support my argument that urban China continues to be shaped by “*external forms of American popular consumption*” (McKay 2008: 63) like ‘Disneyisation’ (Bryman 1999), and that there is a negligible, if any, religious spill-over effect. In addition, the fact that 92% of parent respondents said their child is learning English at a training centre or with a tutor is a strong indicator that children are being exposed to ‘Western’ culture not just at kindergarten, but also during extracurricular lessons.

Halloween and Christmas are becoming increasingly popular in East Asia, especially in urban areas, but their meaning and associated rituals vary from those in the US, for example. For added comparative flavour, the secular celebration(s) of Christmas in Japan are seeing similar hybridisation processes with those transforming Shanghai, in that local cultural adaptation and appropriation are taking place (Kimura and Belk 2005). While the same American visual imaginary of Santa Clauses, reindeer, Christmas trees, lights, and gifts is everywhere, what is distinctively local is the ritual of buying fancy ‘Christmas’ cakes (Kimura and Belk 2005), as well as Christmas becoming a ‘lovers’ festival’ where young couples exchange expensive gifts and go to luxury hotels (Rupp 2003). Also, mirroring Shanghai, where I saw Christmas trees decorated with red envelopes in front of shopping malls, as well as in the five observed kindergartens, visual hybridisation is also transforming big Japanese

cities: a train station in Kyoto, for example, had a giant Christmas tree decorated with the Japanese superhero Astro Boy (Kimura and Belk 2005: 326).

The fact that these two ‘Western’ holidays featured in all three public kindergartens despite the Centre’s dominant discourse prioritising Chinese culture and patriotism stems from the original curricula every kindergarten sees as its ‘selling point’ (20-30% of the content). The upper middle class parents who have access to level one kindergartens are being shaped by the discourse of ‘numeric capital’ (Woronov 2016) and for them ‘quality’ education is inextricably linked with exposure to ‘Western’ culture. Moreover, urban Shanghainese are transformed by the same consumerist global forces, with Halloween and Christmas being some of their most popular manifestations. Management’s explanation as to why these two foreign celebrations continue to be part of kindergarten activities is that they are “*harmless fun, which has no negative impact on spreading patriotism*” (PU2K13). Thus, this is the ‘space of negotiation’ where public kindergartens are ‘whispering back’ to the Centre, circumventing Space1’s control over the dissemination of foreign festivals by mainly employing stealth tactics.

Space1’s increasingly aggressive stand regarding foreign cultural elements like Christmas came as a surprise to me upon my return to Shanghai in 2017, especially its spill over effect into kindergarten life. Given that in all observed kindergartens and from the parent questionnaires the results clearly show that this holiday is both perceived and constructed as secular and purely commercial, devoid of any religious message and celebrated because of its entertainment value only, it is an extreme measure for the Centre to try and stop its celebration just because it is ‘foreign.’ Also, had the Party taken a closer look at this holiday, it would have realised that many of its mainstream traditions have their origins in pagan practices marking the winter solstice, like the Roman festival Saturnalia (Whiteley 2008: 6), with the winter solstice also being an important date in the 24 solar term traditional Chinese calendar. In addition, one of the most important rituals of Christmas, gift-giving, is not the monopoly of Christianity, but a global tradition honoured during many different festivals, and even a human custom as old as time. Hence, I argue that Space1 has many ways at its disposal to construct a narrative that would benefit and even further its interests by encouraging the celebration of Christmas, but of a Christmas infused with Chinese cultural elements, like I observed being done in Space2.

Besides decorating a Christmas tree, the practice of exchanging presents is the ritual most Chinese parents associate with the festival, as shown by my parent questionnaires and corroborated by the children’s responses in class, so the holiday poses no threat to the Centre from a religious standpoint. The only religious overtones the researcher noted in connection to Christmas were some teachers playing English carols, but their deeper religious meaning was lost on the children, as many did not speak English, or, even if they did, they could not understand the underlying religious references. In addition, the Chinese teachers had a very limited understanding of Christianity, so they could not and did not teach anything religious about this celebration. Nowhere during my observations, kindergarten curricula analysis, or teacher interviews did I come across any reference to the biblical narratives of Christ’s birth. Also, I only came across one occasion when a K2 student of Public1 kindergarten succinctly explained to his classmates that Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, without any further details.

The next chapter, “The Periphery as a Place of Resistance,” focuses on Space3, namely bilingual English - Mandarin private kindergartens, which I construct as ‘spaces of agency’ where global cultural narratives intertwine with and resist the national discourse promoting the ‘*cultivation of socialist builders*’ and a homogenous definition of ‘Chineseness.’

Chapter 7: The Periphery as a Place of Resistance: Private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens as spaces of interaction between globalisation and a nationalist dominant discourse

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Defining private kindergartens as Space3, a 'space of agency' for interactions on the Periphery

This chapter focuses on the case studies of two elite private kindergartens in Shanghai with bilingual English-Mandarin streams, constructing them as spaces of resistance to Beijing's homogenising impetus for a nationalist revival, and placing them on the periphery of the dominant discourse. As follows, I label this Space3 in my Centre-Periphery framework and look at it as a privileged space to analyse the link between formal politics - the homogenising discourse of the Centre, and the inherent power dynamics shaping daily kindergarten life as a result of the interplay between global culture and what I label as citizenship and values education. To capture a complex view of how culture is interpreted and disseminated by the key actors associated with the observed kindergartens - management, teaching staff, parents and, to a small extent, senior class (K2) children - I focus on the 2017 celebrations of Halloween and Christmas. For traditional Chinese and patriotic content, the two instances promoting moral education as *lideshuren* (立德树人), I analyse festivities related to China's National Day of the same year, as well as the Spring of 2018. Given that these local holidays have a marginal importance in Space3's curriculum, I only perfunctorily address them, the opposite of my analysis of public kindergartens.

My hypothesis is that, despite the Centre's control over curricula and daily routines significantly increasing in public kindergartens around the 19th National Congress, private bilingual kindergartens were mainly resisting Space1's push for more socialist and traditional Chinese values, as well as a crackdown on foreign celebrations. Using Foucault's understanding of repressive, legal sovereign power and positive disciplinary power (e.g. Foucault 1991; 2008; Hass 1996), I explain why, despite Space1's firmer legislative grasp over ECE curricula and a recommended daily activities schedule, combined with inspections from the Shanghai (SEB) and local Education Bureaus, private bilingual kindergartens continue to resist a Panopticon situation because of the agency of the foreign teachers they employ.

I construct Space3 as a space of interaction between Beijing-driven social constructionism (Durkheim 1961), which I address under the term of 'local forces,' and global discourses embedded in the festivals of Halloween and Christmas. I thus posit this type of kindergarten remains on the periphery of legislative control as Space1.1, the SEB and local education bureaus, as well as the Shanghai Three-Year Action Plans (STYAPs) are purposefully allowing their use of international curricula and teaching patterns, as well as the employment of native English teachers in order to satisfy the demands of the local elite. The privileged population sectors in Shanghai are willing to pay high tuition fees for what they consider to be authentic and immersive 'Western' education.

As follows, the observed bilingual streams use a hybrid British-American curriculum shaped by the critical thinking pattern in the case of Private1 (which they promote as P4C – Philosophy for Children), and an accredited International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP) for Private2, both also employing native English teachers. Moreover,

both pride themselves on promoting the values of multiculturalism and tolerance by organising annual *All Cultures Week/ Month* activities, where different cultures are introduced to the children, as well as a month-long *Language Festival*, where each class prepares an artistic performance in English. These activities ensure that the children are consistently exposed to other cultures, while the Western teachers spend 2-3 days per week with them in Private1, and the entire week in Private2. Catering to the wishes of the parents as customers paying considerable tuition fees to have their children receive a ‘Western’ education (e.g. ME5; PR2K23), these preschools also celebrate all the major holidays of Halloween, Christmas and Easter, which I regard as the most efficient way of exposing children to cultural practices the Centre perceives as threatening to China’s political stability (Xu 2018; May 2018).

To verify my hypothesis, I first look at sovereign power as expressed in the national level official discourse targeting ECE legislation for the private sector since the 2010 Education Reform (tackled at length in Chapter 4), with the focus on curriculum content stipulations, then compare it with its interpretation and subsequent implementation at local level, by analysing four consecutive STYAPs. For a more rounded perspective I also carried out three interviews with local education officials, which were instrumental in my acquiring a more pertinent understanding of how Space1.1 interprets and implements both national and local legislation that regulates the behaviour of the observed private kindergartens, in other words, to gauge the Centre’s disciplinary power at work. Regarding the dissemination of values and citizenship education in Space3, viewed as an expression of the Centre’s control, my analysis of China’s National Day and Spring Festival activities, as well as kindergarten social media posts and interviews with principals and staff show that traditional Chinese culture and patriotism are not part of the curriculum and were celebrated as half-day events, far lacking the grandeur I observed in Space2.

At the local level I use triangulation to assess how [global](#) culture was interpreted and disseminated through Halloween and Christmas by involving three subject groups, namely (1) education officials, who I construct as agents of the Centre-Beijing, (2) kindergarten staff, where I interviewed both private kindergarten principals, as well as six teachers (including one Western teacher in each centre), and (3) parents, whose degree of agency I assessed through parent questionnaires and observations (see Table 7.1 [below](#) for Levels of analysis). The fourth actor, the children themselves, are not the focus of this study, though I include short sections where I capture their varied perceptions of Halloween and Christmas through my observations of their classroom behaviour and conversations.

7.1.2 Legislative framework targeting private kindergartens: the homogenising dominant discourse at national and local levels

I tackle the most important provisions regarding private ECE since 2002 with the aim of making sense of the many contradictions shaping Chinese education and providing a clear narrative as the foundation to understanding why the two observed private kindergartens were still spaces on the Periphery during the academic year 2017-2018, (mostly) out of the Centre’s grasp. This subchapter deals with the question of why the Centre, with a dominant discourse that clearly uses education as a means of ideological control and national unification (Schulte 2017) not only allows but also encourages private institutions, where curricula and teaching patterns are beyond its control and where the risk of young subjects resisting the social constructionism (being moulded into patriotic citizens) through their total cultural immersion into Western culture is high.

The complex status of China’s education has historical roots embedded in the country’s imperial examination culture, followed by a largely private education until the founding of the PRC in 1949, and is also a consequence of the privatisation mentality shaping the country since

the 1980s (Schulte 2017). Especially after Deng Xiaoping's 1992 Southern Tour a new type of profit-driven private schools, like the two private kindergartens in this study, began to emerge. Their legal status was first regulated by a 1997 State Council document, the *Regulations on the Running of Educational Institutions with Social Resources*, which encouraged their establishment, except for religious schools, and provided general guidance, but without financial support.

In the *Private Education Promotion Law* of 2002 (NPC), and its complementary *Private Education Law Implementation Rules*, the focus was on promoting non-public schools to aid China's modernisation, without mentioning restrictions on curricula or teaching patterns, only on profit, with the prerequisite of 'reasonable profit.' However, local education bureaus were left to arbitrarily decide what reasonable profit was, as well as which private schools to subsidise and with what amount. For example, Shanghai's Minhang District, where both observed private kindergarten are located, greatly encourages the private ECE sector (EO2; EO3) and heavily subsidises Private1's Chinese stream because, as a popular new district, it is seeing an increasing number of children while needing to maintain its 99% enrolment rate, as well as responding to the pressure exercised by local parents for sufficient affordable kindergartens (PR1K20; PR1K22).

Further encouragement for the private education sector in Shanghai is to be found in the city's 2006-2008 *STYAP*, where Space1.1 took responsibility for providing three years of quality preschool education to all the children with household registration or a residence permit (Main Measures), years before this stipulation appeared in the 2010 Education Reform. One of its goals was to set up a kindergarten system that was government-led but involved social actors, mentioning that it was expanding on the *Private Education Promotion Law* (which went into effect in 2003) by strengthening the guidance of private kindergartens and actively supporting their development.

The Education Reform of 2010 did not overlook private education, but its focus was public education, especially compulsory and higher education, with ECE having a minor presence. I align with the two ECE academics I interviewed (EE6; EE7), who argue that kindergarten education is constructed by Space1 as a public good, and that the reform's four major documents stipulate the need for quality ECE and equal access in both the public and private sector (see in-depth analysis in Chapter 4).

Thus, in the Development Plan I identified the key words defining the reform as being "*education is part of public welfare*", "*government-led school system*", "*social participation*", "*diversity*", and "*public education and private education*" (2010, Chapter 14). Art. 43 reinforced the Centre's support of private education, stipulating the equal legal status of private schools, as well as preferential policies to promote the development of private education. Regarding the curricula private kindergartens could use, Chapter 16, "Expanding Education Openness," promoted international exchanges and cooperation at all levels of education, from preschool to higher and vocational education, in order to ensure China's international competitiveness.

Beijing's underlying motivation was to create a workforce "*of international talents with a global vision, [with the] ability to participate in international affairs and competition*" (Art. 48). For this to happen, the dominant discourse identified that curricula had to include high quality international education resources, which, I posit, makes the Centre's recent push for moral education and crackdown on Western cultural content clash with this 2010 initiative. In Chapter 18, Art. 56 defined the state's investment in education as "*basic and strategic*" in supporting China's long-term development, while looking at social investment as a complementary component that had to be encouraged via preferential policies. Regarding non-compulsory education, one stipulation mentioned the need to "*cultivate a cost-sharing mechanism [and] adjust tuition fees according to economic development*" (Art. 56).

While these strategies were developed with Chinese compulsory and higher education in mind, there was a spill over effect onto ECE. For example, Public1 and Public3 kindergartens pride themselves on their exchange programmes with American and British nurseries, while also participating in workshops all over the world. In the case of Private1 and Private2, they both use international curricula and employ foreign teachers, but also offer an affordable Chinese stream to Shanghai residents.

In the 2011-2013 *STYAP*, the SEB's objectives were to standardize the construction of private level three kindergartens (*sanjiyuan* 三级园) and build 205 new private centres, as well as gradually meet the kindergarten enrolment needs of migrant workers. Moreover, one of the main measures targeted the involvement of social forces, and encouraged the development of non-profit private kindergartens, which I interpret as a change in policy indicating the Centre's new approach, since 2010, to look at ECE as public welfare.

The following *STYAP* (2015-2017) stipulated the need to continue to ensure three years of quality ECE and mainly focused its efforts on improving public services, defining preschool as “*public welfare, open and diverse, high-quality and balanced, energetic, and with Shanghainese characteristics*” (Main Goals). The last descriptive term indicates the SEB's interest in promoting a curriculum shaped by local culture, which I found to be the case in all three public kindergartens, but a lot less so in the two private ones. According to Vickers (2022), Shanghai's situation is opposite to that of Hong Kong, where expressions of local identity are rarely sanctioned by local officials. Also, the main goal was to enrol all children aged 3 to 6 from the city's permanent population and maintain a 100% admissions rate.

The current *STYAP* (2019-2021) lists among its main goals the need for the local government to strengthen its responsibilities towards quality and scientific ECE and build more public kindergartens, as well as encourage the private education sector. The status of ECE as a public good is reinforced as “*universal, safe, high-quality, diverse and inclusive*” (Main Goals). The most relevant stipulation refers to inclusive private kindergartens, which is the solution the SEB has found to address the challenge of an increased number of children due to migration and the *Two-child policy*. The proposed measure targets newly built residential communities, where existing kindergartens should be turned into public kindergartens or inclusive private kindergartens to ensure the right of children to enjoy inclusive, affordable preschool education (Main Measures).

As my fieldwork took place during the academic year 2016-2017 the third round of *STYAPs* is the most relevant for capturing ECE realities in Shanghai, hence it is the legislation I expand on. Its main measures also mentioned supporting inclusive private kindergartens, as is the case of Private1, which has been opening more classes for the Chinese stream and raised the number of children per class, all in an effort to satisfy its local education bureau. Based on my observations and interviews with both government officials and kindergarten management the “*government-led public-private kindergarten development with social participation elements*” (Main Measure, Art. 7) model is being successfully implemented. Level three private kindergartens were targeted as needing reform, with the SEB aiming at raising their quality level and bridging the gap between different levels to ensure a balanced development of ECE.

This legislation also tackled ECE curricula and teaching patterns and was an extension of the *Preschool Education Curriculum Guide* contouring the ‘anti-subject learning’ measure, which put an end to the entrenched primary school teaching style and disciplinary methods (a legacy of the Soviet model), thus favouring the implementation of “*happy education based on games and play*” (Art.11). However, Article 14 created a legislative loophole that was being exploited by both observed private kindergartens, as it promoted basic literacy before primary school. Because of this, private kindergartens have found creative ways of circumventing ‘anti-subject learning’ by offering optional classes in the afternoon, usually at an additional fee.

I posit that private ECE in Shanghai is currently experiencing a precarious balancing act between stricter official regulations and the uninterrupted practice of teaching primary school-level subjects, the latter driven by the demands of the parents. In line with informant Carol (ME5), who has a deep understanding of the kindergarten milieu in the city because she regularly covers preschool education for the Shanghai Media Group (SMG), the main concern of Shanghainese parents is for their children to get admitted into top-ranked primary schools, which means passing a challenging admissions interview in the core subjects of Chinese, Maths and English, as well as attending a prestigious preschool. This parental obsession with social ranking is a great example of disciplinary power shaping ‘obedient bodies,’ as parents are willing to go to great lengths in terms of financial expenditure and sacrificing their free time to ensure their children have the best ‘accumulation of numeric capital’ (Woronov 2016) possible, and they are perceived as ‘better’ than their peers. Responding to public demand, private kindergartens thus offer what unequivocally is, based on my observations, subject learning in Maths, Chinese character recognition, and English, to prepare six-year-olds for the rigorous learning environment of first grade, motivating it as facilitating a smooth transition between kindergarten and primary school in terms of instilling sound learning skills in the children, but by using games as their core teaching patterns.

Defying the ‘anti-subject learning’ requirement, I noticed that another trend among the Shanghai elite is to bridge this gap by enrolling their children in extracurricular lessons starting from kindergarten. From my parent questionnaires, as well as interviews with educators and public officials, I concluded that, while the official discourse and a minority of parents realise the importance of age-appropriate instruction and giving young children enough time to play every day, they are still cognizant of Shanghai’s exam-driven education, which Foucault aptly defines as a manifestation of disciplinary power (1991). Consequently, parents are faced with a tough choice. On the one hand, they can give their children a happy childhood without any formal subject teaching and take the risk of them falling behind their peers in primary school. On the other, they can enrol them in a bilingual English-Mandarin kindergarten with a plethora of optional classes, as well as pay for training centres and private tutors, signing their offspring up for an achievement-driven childhood.

The best example to highlight this conundrum was given by MEB official Bai, her candid story showcasing that education officials are aware of their ECE guidelines clashing with education realities in Shanghai, but do not have a viable solution to create a harmonious preschool-primary school system and put the parents’ worries at rest, or even to come to a satisfactory decision in their own lives:

“I will give you the example of my cousin’s child, who is now in third grade. When he was in kindergarten all his classmates were having extracurricular lessons. At that time, I told his mother not to take him to any tutoring classes, as children his age should spend their time playing. Many parents think their children should start learning English or Maths since they are little, but I think this is a violation of children’s rights. Because he did not take any additional lessons while in kindergarten, my nephew could not keep up with his classmates when he entered primary school. So, from grade one, he started to attend a training school during the week and at the weekends, finishing his homework as late as 10:30 p.m. some nights. So, I am not sure if my advice was right...” (EO2).

Regarding the situation of private kindergartens in Shanghai, SEB official Huang emphasised that the early education environment was becoming very competitive, hence sub-par kindergartens were facing elimination. According to her, the Shanghainese public has become so discerning that the SEB does not have to police private kindergartens anymore, as, *“People in Shanghai are very well-informed and will choose the best education for their children. It’s all about the survival of the fittest these days, so private kindergartens are becoming better and better to keep attracting parents and ensure they can make a profit”* (EO1).

To me, this means that parents have increased agency in Space3 and are resisting the Centre's rhetoric promoting moral education through their preference for Western curricula and teaching staff. If elite private kindergartens want to stay profitable, they need to offer an attractive package, with bilingual English-Mandarin curricula and native English teachers being at the top of the list of parents' demands (EE6). For Prof. Liu, with the latest ECE legislation in place in Shanghai and in the current political milieu adverse to the dissemination of Western culture, these profit-driven private preschools are cornered into an uncomfortable position:

“Private Kindergartens are walking a fine line between making the parents happy, who are paying as much as 100,000 RMB annually for a Western education in an immersive English environment, while at the same time placating the increased sensitivity of the local government, who is concerned about too much Western culture infiltrating China and threatening socialist ideology and that more lessons about Chinese culture and festivals are needed to ensure that young children do not lose their Chinese identity and love for the motherland” (EE6).

Reflecting the policy guidelines I tackled above, informant Huang (EO1) reinforced that the SEB is encouraging the development of private kindergartens and wants to attract as much societal involvement as possible, as financial investment is badly needed in the ECE sector, the majority of government funding being directed to compulsory education. In her eyes, the current *STYAP (2015-2017)* addresses both public and private kindergartens, but private kindergartens have a special status because of their increased freedom in selecting teaching patterns and curricula. As a direct consequence of the *2012 Curriculum Guidelines*, public kindergartens have a comparatively unified syllabus and use the SEB-approved Learning Activities (*xuexi huodong* 学习活动) teachers manual, while private kindergartens still retain their decision-making power in terms of curriculum and teaching methods, as well as complete autonomy over their tuition fees, with the exception of inclusive private kindergartens, whose local stream tuition matches that of a public kindergarten of the same level (ES4; PR1K20).

Regarding Western curricula content, official Huang (EO1) explained it is overseen by district governments and that private kindergartens are forbidden from disseminating information that threatens China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moreover, reflecting the discourse of the 19th National Congress, she stressed the need for Space1.1 to have more control over curricula and textbooks, arguing that the Centre has to make sure they ideologically reflect the China Dream, and, from an educational perspective, respect age-appropriate teaching methods, with no primary school subject teaching. MEB official Bai (EO2) echoed her words, stating that even though top private kindergartens use their own imported textbooks and materials, usually from the UK, US or Japan, they are also evaluated annually by the local government, which keeps a close eye on the content being taught, as well as if the children's health and safety and the teachers' rights are respected.

7.1.3 Parental agency in the Space-on-the-Periphery

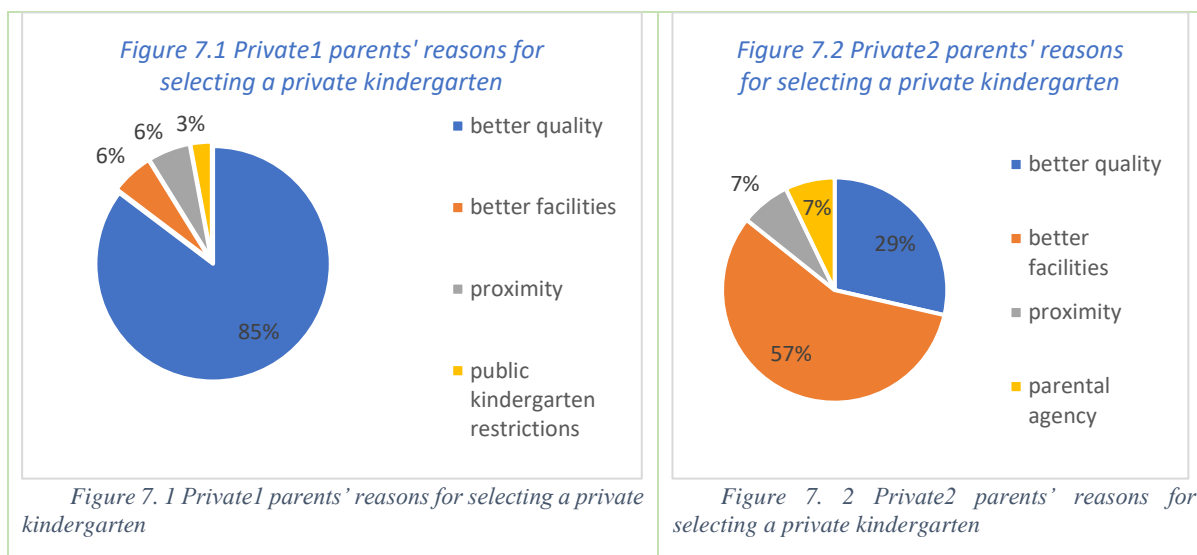
I label private kindergartens as Spaces-on-the-Periphery of the Centre's homogenising discourse, where Beijing is still allowing them to exert agency in choosing their curricula and teaching patterns, because of two reasons. First, there is an undersupply of preschools across China and the only way for Beijing to address this issue is to encourage the private ECE sector by allowing it to stay profit-driven (e.g. the 2016 *Law on Private Education* banned for-profit schools in compulsory education). Second, parents want Western curricula and are willing to pay high tuition fees for this service, which means that if preschool education is to be portrayed as a public good, with 99% enrolment for five- to six-year-olds by 2021 (latest *STYAP*), the government has to incentivise education entrepreneurs by giving them the freedom to present an attractive offer to parents.

Consequently, I wanted to test my hypothesis and see what drove Chinese parents to choose one of the observed private kindergartens, especially whether they subscribed to the current trend in China of prioritising English learning, departing from the premise that this target demographic consists of the socio-economic elite, as both kindergarten tuition fees were over 4000 CNY/ month, when the average net monthly wage in 2018 Shanghai was 7200 CNY (Statista 2020).

To collect relevant data, I had initially decided to distribute the same set of parent questionnaires in two senior classes in each kindergarten, but I ended up designing two different sets, as Private2 management was worried about the information I might collect using a more comprehensive and open-end question format. Hence, I used a 16-question open-ended questionnaire in Private1, structured in two parts, a 9-question section targeting the dissemination of Western and Chinese culture, and a 7-question section aimed at gathering socio-economic data, and collected 32 questionnaires in March 2018. Given the reluctance of the gatekeeper, even though I guaranteed the anonymity of both her kindergarten and the respondents, in Private2 I was only allowed a 13-question multiple choice format and could only collect 10 questionnaires, also in March 2018.

In Private1, the clear majority chose a private kindergarten with a bilingual English-Mandarin stream because of what they consider to be ‘better quality’ education, these 91% mentioning a Western curriculum, diversity, multiculturalism, English education facilitated by foreign teachers, and more modern teaching patterns as the main reasons for their choice. As this question was open-ended, 18 respondents specifically wrote that ‘English’ was the driving factor behind their choice, which I included in the ‘better education’ category, only two individuals listing ‘better facilities’ and ‘proximity,’ with one parent also revealing that public kindergarten enrolment restrictions invalidated that option (Figure 7.1 below). These results confirm the intuitive assumption that parents see private education as a high-quality option and that they are willing to pay higher tuition fees to ensure the academic performance of their offspring (Burgess, Wilson et al. 2015).

In Private2, the 10 respondents were asked to select all the options that fit the reason(s) for choosing a private kindergarten, with ‘better facilities’ selected 8 times, followed by ‘better quality education,’ namely English and a Western curriculum, with 4 votes. The other two options, ‘increased parental agency’ regarding the curriculum and teaching methods, as well as the ‘proximity’ of the kindergarten, were only selected once each, by different respondents (Figure 7.2 below). The fact that only 40% of the respondents were motivated by the English curriculum and native English speaker teachers does not mirror the traditional argument of well-off Chinese parents opting for Western education primarily because of an immersive English environment, which was fully supported by the results obtained in Private1. However, these options are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.



Surprisingly, I only found negligible evidence to support my initial assumption, in line with the research conducted by Goldring and Phillips in the USA (2008), that parents opt for private education because they want to have more agency in what their children are taught and be more involved in their school life. Thus, in the open-ended question in Private1, none of the respondents gave an answer that could fit this explanation, and in the structured, multiple choice Private2 survey only one respondent circled this answer. In a chat I had with one of the K2 parent representatives in Private1, she told me that most parents in her child's classroom are very busy with work, so they do not have the time to get involved in kindergarten activities, being more hands-on at the weekend, when they take their offspring to their various extracurricular activities. According to her, it is the grandparents or the nannies who look after the children during the week, and they cannot be asked to get involved, seldom volunteering for special activities.

However, when asked what extracurricular lessons their children were enrolled in, nine out of ten Private2 parents said that their child is learning English, with five of them employing a private tutor, two teaching their children themselves, and two opting for a language training centre. According to Teacher Ella (PR2K24), a K2 teacher at this kindergarten and the person who helped collect the parent questionnaires, most children in her class supplemented their English learning with extracurricular lessons, in preparation for the primary school entrance test. In Private1, 25 out of the 32 respondents (78%) were providing extra English lessons to their children, with four opting to teach themselves only, and the rest opting for a private tutor or a training centre, with nine out of the 21 parents paying for both types of lessons (see Table 6.13 below for the situation in public kindergartens). One Private1 mother, a Shanghai native who assessed her English level as advanced, explained that *“English is Esperanto. When you grow up, you need English for research and travel, so I want my child to start early and learn well”* (PR1_QUEST_10/32). This result aligned itself with the opinion expressed by informant Carol (ME5) and MEB official Bai (EO2), who explained that expensive private kindergartens have gained so much popularity in the last decade because local parents wish for their children to be exposed to both ‘Western’ culture and learn English. The late July 2021 ban on for-profit tutoring in core education, which directly affected English training centres, did not put an end to elite Shanghainese parents providing English lessons for their children, as they can afford one-on-one tutors. According to follow-up chats with Carol and Private1 Kindergarten’s Teacher Anna this spring, the parents who had their children enrolled in training centres reoriented themselves to individual private tutors, whose contact details they could easily receive from other parents. Even under Covid-lockdown, five- and six-year-old children

continued to have private English lessons online, on Chinese platforms like Zhumu (瞩目) and Tencent Meeting, thus circumventing official legislation.

Regarding the parents' socio-economic background, they are all middle-class and above, given that they can afford tuition fees of over 4000 CNY/ month. In Private2, half of them are Shanghainese natives and the other half come from other provinces, with seven holding a bachelor's degree and three a masters. They assessed their English level as intermediate (5) and advanced (3), with only one respondent each evaluating themselves as beginner or proficient users (Figure 7.3 below). In Private1, four out of the 32 respondents filled out the questionnaire in English, and over half (18 respondents) assessed their English level as intermediate and above (Figure 7.3 below). In this cohort, 66% were not born in Shanghai, indicating that a private kindergarten might have been their only option for quality education if they lacked the necessary residence status to access a public one. Pertaining to their education, two parents were high school graduates, with 94% having at least a bachelor's degree (Figure 7.4 above).

As I could use a more detailed questionnaire in Private1, I collected additional data on the parents' education, as well as plans for their children's future education. As follows, five would like their child to be enrolled in a public primary school, with the same number being happy with either a public or a private one, and 69% having decided to continue on the private education path. Surprisingly, even with their children being six years old, only four parents were undecided about their higher education, with 21 respondents wanting their child to study abroad, only five wishing for a Chinese university and two being happy with either choice (Figure 7.5 below).

7.1.4 Short descriptions of Private1 and Private2 kindergartens and their connections with Space1

To assess exiting counter-discourses to the homogenising influence of disciplinary power I looked at the celebration of Halloween and Christmas in both private kindergartens as expressions of resistance to the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture and patriotic education. First, I provide a short description of each kindergarten, explaining its ranking, curriculum and teaching pattern, as well as relationship with the Centre. I mainly rely on primary data collected from interviews with both kindergarten principals, as well as six senior class teachers (including one Western teacher in each preschool).

Private1 kindergarten is part of a successful Chinese-owned private education group in Shanghai that has various branches throughout the municipality and caters to preschool-aged children, as well as grades 1-12. The branch I observed offers two streams, an affordable local one enrolling the children from its immediate vicinity, where the curriculum is the SEB-approved mainstream one, and a bilingual English-Mandarin stream where foreign teachers work with Chinese partners and use a tailored American-British curriculum (Table 7.2 below). As the purpose of this thesis is to capture local-global interactions in the dissemination of both traditional Chinese - patriotic and Western values, I focused on a bilingual K2 class, and not a Chinese one, where both the curriculum and activities would have been more aligned with the official discourse on ECE I observed in the three public kindergartens (see previous 2 chapters). It is important to note that Private1 has a special rapport with the MEB, as its premises are rented from the local government, and that one of its owners used to be an education official and continued to have close ties with the CCP. Its status is that of an inclusive private kindergarten (PR1K20) with low tuition fees for its Chinese stream, which means that Space1.1 has an increased control over its admissions policy, as well as the image it promotes on social media (with Private1 official WeChat posts after 2017 eschewing the promotion of Western culture in favour of culture-neutral and Chinese festivals).

In the case of Private2, their website states that they use an accredited IB PYP curriculum, which is bilingual English-Mandarin and nurtures the unique development of each child, providing an immersive bilingual environment where children are encouraged to respect difference and embrace multiculturalism (Table 7.3 below) Founded in Hong Kong over 50 years ago, it opened its first branch in Shanghai in the late 1990s and has become a recognised brand in the city. While it also offers a much cheaper local stream, where the instruction is in Mandarin only, most of its classes are bilingual, with the annual tuition fees reaching close to 100,000 RMB/ year. According to Principal Rosie (PR2K23), as a level one grade one kindergarten they are part of the ECE elite in Shanghai, which allows them to be very selective about the children and parents they accept.

Moreover, in line with Teacher Ella (PR2K24), Private2's spokesperson, elite private kindergartens are superior to public ones in China because they are "*more attuned to current social trends as they put more emphasis on individual development and modern teaching techniques.*" She also mentioned that Private2 aims at "*first serving the parents' interests [for a quality Western curriculum], then catering to the children's needs*" (Ibid.) According to Principal Rosie (PR2K23), as her kindergarten is profit-driven it is important to meet the parents' expectations, and thus they "*also offer reading and writing courses, which are very popular now, but within an environment which suits young children, so we are respecting the 'anti-subject teaching' policy.*" These extra lessons mirror the ones offered in Private1 and are elite private kindergartens' solution to circumvent the SEB regulations banning formal teaching by advocating a play-driven teaching pattern, even though in both kindergartens I noticed exercise books for both Maths and English.

Nevertheless, consistent with the trend I observed in Public2, around 15-20% of the children in both kindergartens would leave after lunch to attend extracurricular classes at least once a week in the second term of K2, as their parents wanted them to prepare for their primary school interviews. Both Teachers Ella (PR2K24) and Nora (PR1K21) strongly disagreed with this practice, as they argued their respective kindergartens already offered extracurricular activities.^{lxxxvi}

While the examples above showcase the great level of agency parents have in demanding private kindergartens offer extracurricular lesson in preparation for primary school, their direct involvement in kindergarten activities is limited. In addition, from my observations and interviews I concluded they have less of a say in Private2, as this kindergarten has a better reputation than Private1 and enrolment is extremely competitive. Consequently, Principal Rosie (PR2K23) shared that the kindergarten is in charge of the curriculum and the parents, upon choosing her kindergarten implicitly agree with their teaching philosophy and style and will not question either their curriculum or teaching methods. Teacher Ella (PR2K24) went a step further, saying that "*if they do not agree with us, we will not accept their children, so we do not need to follow any of the parents' suggestions or ideas.*"

As follows, my fieldwork strongly indicates that, during the academic year 2017-18 Private2 continued to focus on its unique IB curriculum and on disseminating Western culture through grand Halloween, Christmas and even Easter celebrations, as well as on catering to the parents' wishes for extracurricular lessons in English, Maths and Chinese characters. Standing out from the decision of all three public kindergartens and Private1 to promote more traditional Chinese and patriotic activities, especially on their official WeChat accounts, Private2 did not mention their celebration of China's National Day, nor anything related to the 19th National Congress in 2017.

In line with the ECE curriculum and teaching pattern recommendations given by the SEB and reflected in the 2015-2017 STYAP, both private kindergartens used a child-centred approach, where their lessons and activities were designed to meet children's individual needs. However, instead of a China-centric and patriotic core curriculum like the one being

disseminated in Space2, according to Principal Rosie (PR2K23) Private2 aimed at reaching three goals, namely nurturing inquiring, knowledgeable and responsible learners; promoting intercultural understanding and respect; and creating a better and more peaceful world. I see this philosophy of multiculturalism and respecting difference, of shaping global citizens, as the main reason why Private2 shied away from overtly patriotic events even around the *shijiuda* (e.g. not organising a large-scale national day celebration) and took a curricular approach that avoided politicising teaching and indoctrinating its young learners to believe in the Party and China's "5000-year-old civilisation narrative" (Ross 2014).

Concerning the influence local Party branches (Space1.2) and recent legislation encouraging the cultivation of a moral kindergarten staff, well-versed in the 12 core socialist values and able to infuse them in their kindergarten's curriculum, ^{lxxxvii} Teacher Anna (PR1K20) revealed that Space3 teachers remained largely unaffected. Moreover, because of her being the K2 age-group coordinator for both the local and bilingual streams in Private1 she needed to have a good grasp of the workings of the SEB, as well as the latest legislation (like the *STYAPs* and *2012 Curriculum Guidelines*) to have everything in order for the annual inspection from the local education bureau, but that regular teachers are both unaware of and disinterested in ECE policy content. It was also her responsibility to check whether the teaching staff wrote correct lesson plans and upheld the kindergarten's curriculum and teaching methods.

Except for Private1's Teacher Anna, none of the other Chinese teachers in either Private1 or Private2 had heard of the *STYAPs*, only being vaguely familiar with the *Curriculum Guidelines*, and had not participated in any patriotic training organised by Space1.2, nor were they using lesson plans to promote moral education as defined by Xi Jinping Thought. Teacher Ella (PR2K24), even though she was Private2's spokesperson, seemed unaware of SEB requirements and overall ECE regulations in China, her explanation being that the teaching staff relied on detailed lesson plans provided by the kindergarten. Her position was mirrored by both foreign teachers I spoke with, Teacher Vicky of Private1 and Teacher George of Private2, who were only familiar with their preschool's Western curricula.

Because this section relies on primary data collected from interviews with kindergarten management and teaching staff, I managed to add insight into how these three different subjects react to social constructionism, with the foreign teachers being the only ones to be fully unaffected, given their ignorance of SEB regulations. In Private1, both Principal Stella and Chinese teachers Anna and Nora aligned themselves with the dominant discourse and, exhibiting political correctness by talking about the importance of the children learning about Chinese culture and loving their country, even though the kindergarten curriculum prioritised Western culture. The situation was completely different in Private2, where Principal Rosie and Chinese teacher Ella focused on their kindergarten's accredited IB PYP curriculum, and there was a clear undercurrent of pride in their voices when they talked about their immersive bilingual environment, as well as the fact that they promote Western culture, not Chinese festivals or a patriotic discourse.

7.2 Performing Halloween and Christmas

In the following part I analyse Halloween and Christmas narratives in Space3 through the data I collected from interviews with kindergarten officials and teachers, parent questionnaires, observations of related events, and, when available, social media posts from their official WeChat accounts and websites. My aim is to assess the dissemination and, to a degree, the internalisation of both festivals in the two private kindergartens, and also see whether the 19th National Congress affected them in any way. Moreover, I will demonstrate how, while the Chinese staff is being shaped by both sovereign and disciplinary power, foreign

teachers remain unaffected because they do not speak Mandarin, are not given any training about what ECE curriculum guidelines they should follow in class and, most importantly, retain the freedom to teach whatever they want unsupervised.

Even though the activities related to Halloween and Christmas were more opulent than in all three public kindergartens, echoing the decision of Public1 demonstration kindergarten Private1 chose not to focus on these festivals on its official WeChat account, preferring instead to use its own app and private classroom chat groups. In stark contrast, throughout the academic year 2017-18 Private2 continued to celebrate 'Western' festivals and heavily featured them online, seemingly unaffected by the *shijiuda* and the apprehension I observed in the other four kindergartens regarding their dissemination of Western culture. I explain these conflicting decisions applying a panoptic lens (Foucault 1991), with subjects (principal and teachers) in an inclusive private kindergarten moulded by disciplinary power and behaving in a sanctioned manner on social media because of Space1's surveillance and potential punitive actions. During my fieldwork Private2's principal and teachers seemed unconcerned about the Centre tightening its control over the narratives private kindergartens disseminated online and continued to ignore promoting local festivals, but their WeChat account shows a shift starting with 2018, with Chinese holidays balancing foreign ones.

7.2.1 Private1's Halloween discourse and foreign teachers as subjects resisting disciplinary power

Western Teacher Vicky (PR1K22), the person in charge of organising Halloween, shared that, while the curriculum had not changed, the lesson plans for the 2017-2018 academic year promoted Western culture to a considerably lesser extent than in prior years and that the principal had also asked the teachers to make sure they balanced foreign events and activities with Chinese ones. According to her, in 2015 and 2016 Halloween had been a week-long affair, but in 2017 Principal Rosie informed the teachers that they will only hold a one-day activity, as there was no need to dedicate too much time to a Western festival. To Vicky, this decision was surprising, as in the past both children and parents had greatly anticipated this festival, with the kindergarten also heavily featuring it on its WeChat platform. I corroborated her statement by looking at Private1's official posts where, for the period of October-November 2017, there was no mention of how the kindergarten celebrated Halloween.

However, Private1 covered the Double Ninth and Mid-Autumn Festivals, as well as China's National Day, deciding to promote traditional Chinese values and patriotism over Western festivals, choice which supports my argument that the Centre's control over inclusive private kindergarten activities and curriculum content increased around the 19th NCCCP. Moreover, around the same time this kindergarten organised its annual Sports Day, which, according to Teacher Anna (PR1K20), has become more important than Halloween as it embodies the kind of curriculum the SEB is pushing for, namely the promotion of physical exercise and free play. Another indicator that the celebration of Halloween decreased in importance was that no parents were invited, even though that used to be the norm. Moreover, the children did not go trick-or-treating in the neighbourhood, which also used to be an excellent opportunity to locally promote their unique curriculum, management deciding to keep the activity contained to kindergarten premises.

On 31st October 2017, Private1 kindergarten was aflutter with activity and spooky Halloween music filling the halls. Similar to the other three kindergartens that also celebrated this festival (Public1, Public3 and Private2), most of the children arrived in costume and carrying trick-or-treat bags. The teaching staff were also dressed up and the kindergarten was filled with spiders, spider webs, Jack-o'-lanterns, ghosts, witches and monsters. Consistent

with the costume choices I saw in the other observed kindergartens, both private and public, the children showed a clear preference for Western characters, donning Disney and Marvel garb, complemented by witches, pirates, knights, mermaids and princesses.

The morning activities grouped two classes at a time and had the children take part in six different events (Table 7.4 below), which were also downsized compared with previous years. Private1 still kept the elements most identified with Halloween, namely going trick-or-treating, exploring a haunted house, carving a Jack-o'-lantern and watching fun videos. Moreover, Teacher Vicky, as the festival coordinator, chose the cartoon *Winnie the Pooh's Halloween* to be watched in every classroom, as well as for the teachers to sing and dance the Super Simple Songs collection of Halloween songs.^{lxxxviii}

Designed for a non-native, Asian audience, these songs have been used in Private1 since at least 2014, not just to expose the children to Halloween, but to all the major Western festivals like Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter (PR1K22). Given that YouTube cannot be accessed in China without a VPN because of the country's firewall, Teacher Anna (PR1K20) shared that few Chinese teachers were initially familiar with these Halloween videos, but they are now using them every year. In addition, the fact that Teacher Vicky chose *Winnie the Pooh* to familiarise the children with Halloween and her proposal was given the green light by the principal, despite the sensitivity of this character in China given its comparison to President Xi (e.g. Haas 2018) may indicate that management did not carefully read the proposal and that teachers, especially Western ones, still retain a lot of freedom in choosing what to teach.

Because of the agency of foreign English teachers, I contend that private kindergartens are still on the Periphery of the official discourse, mostly because the language barrier allows them to get past the kindergarten gatekeepers and local education officials. Thus, as foreign teachers' lesson plans contain little detail and because foreign festival activities are usually passed over in public WeChat posts, the culture they disseminate is overlooked by the Centre and very difficult to both keep track of or control - *How can kindergarten principals and age-group leaders, many speaking limited English, know what their Western teachers are doing in class, given the language barrier between them and the rare occasions the first actually observe their lessons?* According to Teacher Vicky (PR1K22), because of the limited supervision over daily lessons due to Chinese co-teachers often leaving the classroom, the absence of panopticon gives Western teachers the freedom to teach whatever they want, expanding on their simplistic lesson plans any way they see fit, with management only being interested in an orderly classroom. Teachers Anna (PR1K20) and Nora (PR1K21) confirmed that the foreign teacher is responsible for English days, so the Chinese co-partner takes on a supporting role and does not interfere in the lesson or the culture being disseminated. It may also be the case that kindergarten management is fully aware that native English teachers are exposing children to their respective ideological convictions, as well as sharing cultural practices from their native countries, but use the language barrier as an excuse to claim ignorance about what is going on in the classroom.

In addition, there is little control Space1 can exert over foreign teachers because the latter are not given training on the SEB regulations and ECE guidelines they should follow, like the *2012 Guidelines* for designing an appropriate curriculum for children 3-6 years of age. While, in theory, the Chinese teachers are using these directives when developing their lesson plans and sharing them with their Western partners, Teacher Vicky had not heard of them or the STYAPs in her three years working for Private1. She was only familiar with the MEB because of its annual inspection and "*the frenzy when they come to check our curriculum, the classrooms, our lesson plans*" (PR1K22), adding that the Chinese teachers prepare well in advance, but foreign teachers are never worried because their lesson plan are in English and no one reads them.

I consequently argue that much of this freedom comes from the Centre's ignorance, as Western teachers do not even know there are SEB-driven policies they should obey, and not all Chinese officials and kindergarten management responsible for implementing ECE policies have a high-enough level of English to understand what the English teachers are doing in class or read their lesson plans – now would they want to, as native English teachers are the reason parents pay high fees and why elite private kindergarten principals are very well paid. The free reign of foreign English teachers in organising 'Western' events like the case study of Halloween and designing their own lesson plans with a simplistic outline they can then add to in class, as well as no supervision of their actual lessons are prominent reasons why I decided to define private kindergartens as Spaces-on-the-Periphery, despite the increased control of the Centre, especially in the case of inclusive private kindergartens. The language barrier between most kindergarten principals and local officials, subjects shaped by disciplinary power, and native English teachers resisting it allows the Margin to exist in a grey area barely tangent to the dominant discourse. The first do not really know or want to know what the latter are teaching, and the latter have no knowledge of Spacel's requirements, especially the Centre's increased wariness about the dissemination of 'foreign' culture, which it perceives as "*infecting China's youth*" (Fish 2017) by replacing traditional Chinese and socialist values with 'other,' potentially liberal ideas.

7.2.2 Private2's Halloween discourse: parents and foreign teachers as subjects resisting disciplinary power

Private2's two bilingual posts about Halloween were an excellent visual record capturing the abundance of thematic decorations throughout the kindergarten, as the premises were transformed into an homage to the colours black, orange and purple, with plastic Jack-o'-lanterns, ghosts and garlands everywhere. This display by far surpassed what I saw during my visit in late October at Private1, where, due to space constraints caused by the MEB's pressure to open more classes as well as to limit the dissemination of Western culture the Halloween event was more restrained than in previous years.

Mirroring the Halloween rituals I observed in the other preschools, the teaching staff, a combination of Chinese and native English speakers, were all in costume and coordinated the activities, the main attractions being a haunted house, going trick-or-treating and a dress up parade (Table 7.5 below). However, the most notable difference was that this event was organised by volunteer parents and that the majority of the children were accompanied by an adult who was also wearing a costume. As a profit-driven kindergarten Principal Rosie (PR2K23) underlined the importance of involving the parents in the kindergarten's daily life and ensuring they were "*content with the service they are given.*" This thinking was mirrored by Private1's Teacher Nora (PR1K21), who went a step further and emphasized the mercantile nature of private kindergartens where,

"As private kindergarten teachers our main role is not to educate the children anymore, but to cater to the parents and make sure they are always happy. As the kindergarten's goal is to first turn a profit, then educate children, we lose our role as educators that teachers in a public kindergarten have and are relegated to that of the service industry."

As word of mouth is a vital promotion strategy in China (ME5), Shanghai being no exception, Principal Rosie (PR2K23) shared that such festivals are great opportunities to involve the parent committee and thus create strong links between the children, their parents and the teaching staff. One of the two November posts covering this festival, entitled "Knock, knock, trick-or-treat, who are you?" was written by the kindergarten's PTA and described their involvement in this activity, select volunteers going so far as to decorate the kindergarten the

night before the festivities. The message conveyed by the parents was that this was an excellent opportunity for them to work together with their children and the teachers in creating spooky decorations, selecting a costume and also enjoying fun activities like going trick-or-treating and giving the children sticker tattoos.

Halloween at Private2 took off with a Skeleton Dance, everyone doing the moves during the morning PE routine. Another thematic activity was the Halloween photo booth, where the children and parents could take funny pictures with a variety of props. The October birthday children were also celebrated, with the organising committee ordering special Halloween cakes and pumpkin-shaped treats. The “Happy Halloween” WeChat post contained many more pictures of the activities, like pinning a spider on a spiderweb, decorating a Halloween bag, taking part in a ‘candy and spoon race,’ or painting and decorating paper masks. In one of the rooms, just like in Private1, a witch’s cauldron was hung over a fake fireplace and children could gather slimy ingredients from around the classroom and brew their own magic potion. The haunted house activity was complemented by a treasure hunt and another classroom organised pumpkin bowling, with real pumpkins. The different classes could go from location to location throughout the day and take part in all these different activities. Trick-or-treating was reserved for the afternoon and was contained to only five locations, Private2 not being in the habit of organising anything in the neighbourhood, with most of the children using the bags they had decorated in the morning.

As this was the only one of the five kindergartens that had not made any changes to its celebrations during the 2017-2018 academic year, nor did it decide to tone down the promotion of its Western festival-based activities online, I wanted to see if this trend continued to the present. Hence, as I still had access to its public WeChat account, I looked at all its posts until the spring of 2020, when, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, children stopped attending kindergarten. In October 2018 Halloween was introduced with the title of a ‘dress up fun day,’ without the previous culture specific tags of ‘Halloween’ and ‘trick-or-treat,’ and lacked both the extensive number of pictures and the detailed description I saw for 2017, only showcasing the children going trick-or-treating and eating candy while in costume. On the other hand, the Mid-Autumn Festival, which had not even been mentioned the previous years, was showcased extensively, the picture I found representative being that of Western teacher dressed as Chang’e (嫦娥), the moon goddess, giving moon cakes to the traditionally dressed Chinese children surrounding her.

For the 2019-2020 academic year I could find no mention of Halloween or Christmas, even though these events took place before the pandemic, the kindergarten opting for culture-neutral posts, with the exception of covering their Chinese New Year activity. Of further interest is that the Mid-Autumn Festival was not mentioned either and that China’s National Day activity was not covered in 2017 or any of the following years, choices I discuss in the section on *Performing patriotism and traditional Chinese culture* below.

7.2.3 Performing Christmas in Private1 kindergarten: An American narrative with Chinese elements

In the case of Private1 I had the opportunity to assess the dissemination of Christmas from a variety of activities and used triangulation to get an informed view on this kindergarten’s dissemination of this festival. Hence, I observed all three actors, namely management and teaching staff, parents and children in the celebration of Christmas-related events in December 2017 and I complemented my observations by analysing official WeChat posts and a parent questionnaire. Regarding my ethnographic contribution, I visited the kindergarten on four occasions, namely during their charity bazaar, Winter Concert, an open day activity celebrating

both Christmas and the New Year (where the parents were also invited), and for a lesson on 22nd December which targeted Christmas.

On the kindergarten's WeChat account I could only find one December post related to Christmas, a bilingual recommendation for the best books to read about this festival - consistent with how they promoted Halloween - as well as a short description defining Christmas as "*many things to many people, a special time to spend together in peace and harmony. It is also Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus, angels, lights, Christmas trees, cards, carols, presents, and prayers. Christmas is peace, love, and joy.*" According to Chinese Teacher Nora (PR1K21), management decided to post more detailed information about their activities on the kindergarten's private app, and for the teachers to share more content and pictures with the parents via their respective classroom's WeChat account. This decision ensured the privacy of the parents and children, but also kept Private1's social media presence mostly free of Western cultural influences, in line with the MEB's expectations for an inclusive private kindergarten.

Public1 has the Western tradition of organising a charity bazaar every December, event that has become widespread among private kindergartens using a Western curriculum and that it shares with Private2. Principal Stella (PR1K19) explained that this activity has the purpose of teaching young children to be charitable, which is not only a value celebrated by Christians, but a universal value that Confucius himself upheld. Thus, she deconstructed the Christmas bazaar from symbolising the charity good Christians should show during the celebration of Jesus' birth, turning it into an example of nurturing philanthropic acts as one of the pillars of traditional Chinese culture.

The charity bazaar was organised in the yard and saw each class set up a stall where the children could display their old toys and sell them at small prices, as well as a space where local artisans displayed their wares, from sugar-spun zodiac animals to handmade toys and trinkets. This activity was devoid of any association with Christmas, Teacher Nora only explaining to the children and volunteer parents that the proceeds from the toy sale will go to an underprivileged school and why charity is important. While the purpose of this event was to teach children moral behaviour, my observation of Teacher Nora's K2 class revealed that the children's main concern was buying as many interesting toys as possible, and they were doing their best to bargain with their peers to drive the price down. Thus, while the grownups' intention was to teach their young charges about sharing and being generous toward those less fortunate, this lesson in ethics was too difficult for five-year-olds to understand.

The syncretic trend of infusing Western festivals or traditions, especially those with religious connotations, with Chinese elements was also displayed in Private1's Winter Concert, as the mainly Western-inspired performances of years past were balanced by Chinese acts. Moreover, the iconic name 'Christmas Concert' was changed into the 'Winter Concert' in 2017, the latter being used by the Chinese presenter, while the Western MC, who introduced all the performances in English, called it the 'Christmas Concert' throughout. My analysis of the senior class performances revealed that the two from the Chinese stream each chose a Chinese-only programme. The one to stand out the most because of its strong patriotic message had a socialist hammer and sickle background, with children dressed in blue army uniforms standing at attention, followed by a montage of pictures from the Great Wall, Tian'An Men, the national flag and the Forbidden City. Against this backdrop, which was framed by plastic garlands and Christmas trees that were the fixed stage decorations, uniformed five- and six-year-olds marched across the stage, proudly waving China's national flag. This was followed by a military-inspired choreography, ending with five girls holding up a golden star each and making the Chinese flag, as the boys marched around them holding smaller flags.

Teacher Vicky (PR1K22) told me this was the first time she saw such a patriotic performance featured during the Winter Concert, which used to be a space for showing off the children's English skills and pop culture performances. She noticed Chinese teachers choosing

more traditional Chinese performances and popular international songs over carols, the latter carrying too many religious undertones. Her words were supported by what I saw during this concert, as the volunteer parents chose to perform a short Chinese play, “The Blind Man and the Elephant,” with the storyteller and actors all wearing traditional clothing. Moreover, the teachers’ act was a dance montage of four popular songs, three of them international hits in 2017 and one a traditional Chinese dance with umbrellas. While all three bilingual K2 classes chose to sing at least one carol, only one class wished the audience “Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.” Also, the parting words of the two presenters were to thank the parents for their support, not even the foreign host wishing the audience a happy Christmas. This example indicates the Centre’s disciplinary power limiting even the foreign teachers’ behaviour in the public sphere. On the other hand, as I highlight below, they retain their freedom in the classroom, where they still teach the cultural practices they are familiar with from their respective Western countries.

As I wanted to have a closer understanding of how Private1 disseminated Christmas during a regular class, being particularly interested in assessing how much K2 children knew about this holiday, I observed Western Teacher Vicky’s class during the morning of 22nd December, days after the Winter Concert. Many children were wearing the Christmas-themed clothes they had used during their stage performance, complete with reindeer antlers. During the morning free play time they listened to carols in the background, then watched a short video about Santa Claus and his village in Lapland. Circle Time ended with Teacher Vicky asking them to write a letter to Santa copying the phrase they had learnt the previous day, namely “Dear Santa, please bring me...,” then draw the things they would like to receive. Observing the children’s behaviour I noticed the majority could copy the sentence and they were talking enthusiastically among themselves, in a mixture of English and Mandarin, about whether Father Christmas was real or not, their tree decorations at home, and which presents they hoped to get.

While the previous years the children had had an activity where they made a gingerbread house from Ikea - an example of how far-reaching globalisation is - in 2017 they just decorated a small Christmas tree together and shared some snacks they had brought from home. During the main lesson Teacher Vicky had a chat with them about what they knew about Christmas, then they read together the story *Is that You, Santa?*, an All Aboard Picture Reader book Private1 usually uses in its bilingual stream for teaching literacy in English. The book introduces children to the American version of Christmas, as Santa Claus, in his reindeer-pulled sled, brings gifts on Christmas Eve, disseminating the stereotypical images of the trimmed tree, stockings hung over the fireplace and cookies and milk waiting for Santa. Hence, the children were exposed to core elements of an American Christmas (Whiteley 2008) and, as my observation of their main lesson showed, were also able to communicate in English about this festival. While the full conversation is in Table 7.6 below, I decided to include a short excerpt to show the children’s agency and the extent to which they were familiar with Christmas. Also, except when indicated in the transcript, the conversation took part in English and the vignette reproduces it verbatim, as I was given permission to record.

Teacher Vicky (TV): Santa lives in Finland, Europe, where there’s lots of snow. [The Chinese teacher translates Finland and Europe into Mandarin, so everyone can understand] How do you think Santa can travel so fast all around the world in one night?

Boy1: Magic.

Boy2: Reindeer can fly.

TV: Exactly, so where will Santa put your gifts?

Girl1: Stockings.

TV: Good, anywhere else?

Girl2: Under the tree.

TV: Do you have a Christmas tree at home?

Class (at the same time): Yes/ No! [About a third of the children say they have a Christmas tree at home]

TV: Do you think Santa is tired after delivering so many toys?

Class: Yes!

TV: Why?

Girl3: The toys are heavy!

TV: So, what can we give Santa to help him a bit?

Girl4: Milk and cookies

TV: Yes, milk and cookies. How about to the reindeer? They have magic and they can fly on Christmas Eve and they have to pull a very heavy sleigh. What can we give the reindeer?

Boy3: Cookies

TV: What do you guys think?

Class: Cookies!

TV: Ok, so this morning we will share some cookies and snacks you guys have brought today and you have to remember to put a plate of cookies out for Santa and his reindeer on Christmas Eve. And remember to leave your letter for Santa next to the cookies, so he will know what gifts to give you.

The fact that Teacher Vicky's pupils could express themselves so well in English, K2 being their third year in the bilingual stream, as well as the many details they knew about Christmas show the success Private1's cultural immersion curriculum had in disseminating Western culture, as well as in shaping the children to feel comfortable using English daily.

Wanting to see whether there was a connection between performing Christmas at kindergarten and parental behaviour, in my Private1 parent questionnaire I included a question about whether the family celebrated Christmas at home, and if they did, to give as much detail as possible. Out of the 32 questionnaires, two respondents chose not to answer the question, six did not celebrate at home and 24 did. From those who did not organise anything special for Christmas three respondents motivated their choice by arguing that, as Chinese people, they do not celebrate Western festivals, while one said that the kindergarten had organised enough activities. From the 70% who celebrated at home only 11 families decorated a tree, but they all bought their children gifts and had a special dinner.

Private1 also invited the parents to take part in a half-day celebration that fused both Christmas and the New Year in late December 2017, activity I had the opportunity of observing. This event had the parents prepare gifts for their children, which were then placed under a Christmas tree in each classroom. Also, after a teacher dressed up as Father Christmas visited each class to give every child a 'peace apple' (*ping'an guo* 平安果) - a gift prepared by the kindergarten - the parents and children bonded over making and eating different kinds of dumplings together, activity chosen to celebrate their traditional culture. These two activities are an excellent example of the hybridisation taking place in top preschools in Shanghai, with both Western and Chinese customs being integrated into the celebration of a Western festival, trend I also noticed in Private2's WeChat posts of the last two years. Taking the dissemination of traditional culture a step further, in Teacher Vicky's class some parents prepared a short demonstration where they showed the children their calligraphy and Chinese painting skills.

Given my four visits to Private1 in December 2017, as well as the plethora of primary data I collected from interviews, parent questionnaires and kindergarten posts I am confident that my analysis of Christmas is well-rounded. As follows, compared to previous years Principal Stella decided to relabel the annual Christmas show into a 'winter concert' and asked the entire teaching staff, both Chinese and foreign, to design artistic programmes that also

featured Chinese elements. However, the foreign teachers resisted the dominant discourse's push for political correctness in public and increased moral education in curricula, as in the example of the Western teacher presenter who used the term 'Christmas Concert' throughout. Moreover, while in the classroom, as was the case with Teacher Vicky, the foreign teachers continue to disseminate their respective cultures and customs, like the American narrative of Santa Claus, without any censorship from the principal. My observations also show that Private1, as an inclusive kindergarten, was much more affected by the Centre, working through the MEB, in deciding its curriculum content, or at least what it promoted online as being its curriculum and activities, with its Halloween and Christmas events not featuring on its official WeChat account. Its close ties with the local government and the Party, forged through renting their premises from the Minhang government and the owners being CP members are the causes I identified for disciplinary power shaping this kindergarten to a much greater extent than Private2.

7.2.4 Performing Christmas in Private2 Kindergarten: Happy Christmas Week

With the gatekeeper constantly vigilant of my presence in Private2, in December 2017 I was only allowed to observe their annual Christmas Show, so this section mostly relies on data I acquired from my interview with Teacher Ella (PR2K24), a structured parent questionnaire and from analysing the kindergarten's social media posts. Unfortunately, I was unable to observe a Christmas-related lesson or their Christmas - New Year event, as was the case in Private1.

Their Christmas Show featured in three WeChat posts, while the Christmas-related activities lasted for an entire week, called 'Happy Christmas Week,' and were covered in detail on the kindergarten's official website. On WeChat, one of the posts had the title "Holly Jolly Christmas," while the annual performance was entitled the 'Christmas Show,' proof that Private2 did not shy away from using the name of this Western festival publicly. Given that this was not the behaviour I had noticed in Private1 I asked Teacher Ella if she had noticed any changes in Private2's curriculum or activities in connection with the 19th National Congress, or whether they had any directives from Space1.1 asking them to balance the dissemination of Western culture with Chinese elements. She denied any such involvement, being adamant that her kindergarten was not affected and that only public kindergartens and schools were targeted, position that was supported by my observation of the Christmas Show, as well as the analysis of Private2's WeChat posts during the academic year 2017-2018, which predominantly featured Western festivals.

As follows, during my observation of the Christmas performance, which had teachers and children perform together and was the most important event of the academic year, I noticed that all the chosen songs and dances belonged to a Western repertoire, without a single patriotic performance. This contrasted Private1's New Year festival, where children dressed as soldiers paraded on stage while waving the Chinese flag. Most of the performers wore Christmas clothes and sung popular American carols like *Jingle Bells*, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* and *Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer*. There was a single nod to Chinese traditional culture when some senior class children recited famous Chinese poems, but this act was balanced by another class who performed a short Western-inspired play entitled *The Night Before Christmas*. Further proof of this kindergarten's resistance to the dominant discourse was the name of this event, the "Private2 Kindergarten Christmas Show 2017," which was translated as such into Chinese and posted on social media. The stage was an explosion of little elves, reindeer and Santa hats, snowflakes, and snowmen, with the children wishing the audience a "Merry Christmas" at the end, and Santa making an appearance on stage to give everyone a gift.

As I did not have the opportunity to officially talk with a foreign teacher, management only granting me permission to interview its spokesperson (Teacher Ella) I rely on an informal chat with Western Teacher George during the Christmas performance to assess the degree of resistance foreign teachers had to disciplinary power. He disclosed that the foreign staff receive general lesson plans and weekly and monthly topics, but that they had a lot of freedom in selecting what teaching resources to use, especially popular culture aids like children's books and short videos (PR2K25). His words confirm what Private1's Teacher Vicky (PR1K22) shared about the freedom she experienced regarding her selection of teaching materials. Teacher George (PR2K25) added that he uses YouTube to look for songs and videos for his lessons and that neither management nor his Chinese partner ever told him he was not allowed to disseminate certain cultural elements like customs or religion. Moreover, his class performed two traditional carols onstage, as Principal Rosie had not asked him to balance his selection with a Chinese component, showing that, in contrast to Private1, in this kindergarten foreign teachers retained their agency even in the public sphere. In addition, the Christmas Show performance delivered by the Private2 foreign teachers was a funny rendition of "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer."

My analysis of the information available online about Private2's "Happy Christmas Week" shows that, similar to Private1, they organised a charity bazaar, while another day the children were treated to a magic show, celebrating both Christmas and the New Year. Volunteer parents were again very hands-on in organising all these activities, similar to the PTA's key role in organising Halloween. The dissemination of Western customs continued through a Christmas parade, as well as through many games like a reindeer race or decorating cookies. Also, every classroom had a Christmas tree, and the children took turns taking a picture with Santa (a teacher in disguise), who also gave everyone a small gift. Another day the children were treated to a lunch the kindergarten introduced as a 'Christmas dinner' where they were told that chicken nuggets, 'Santa Claus rice balls' (a bed of rice decorated with veggies and meat to look like Santa's head) and cupcakes with green frosting were traditional Christmas fare. I decided to include the last example to show how Western culture is interpreted by Chinese management and that, on many occasions, Western customs become hybridised and part of local culture, like Christmas rice balls or the Christmas 'peace apples' gifted to the children by Private1 management.

Pertaining to the parents' behaviour, two multiple-choice questions in the parent questionnaire helped me gather information about how they celebrated this festival in their respective family. Accordingly, 100% of the respondents said they had celebrated Christmas at home in 2017. Given Private2 management's reticence towards what information I might have gained access to (as they could not control the parents' answers), I was only allowed a multiple-choice format, so I designed seven options to evaluate the activities the parents organised. The results show that all ten respondents gave their children a gift, six trimmed a Christmas tree and had a special dinner, while others also sung carols (3 respondents), told Christmas stories (2) and watched a related cartoon together (1). Even though I gave the parents the extra option of adding a special activity they organised, none of them filled it out. Compared with Private1, where only 70% celebrated at home, Private2 parents were more interested in making Christmas part of their annual rituals, but I must also consider that I collected 32 surveys in Private1, as opposed to only 10 in Private2.

While the celebration of Christmas in 2017 saw Private2 fully embracing this Western festival, with a week-long event and an annual performance publicly promoted as the 'Christmas Show,' I was interested in seeing if this resistance to the Centre was being continued after 2018. Analysing the kindergarten's official WeChat account, as well as its website I discovered that, in 2018, the event had been re-branded into a 'Winter Celebration.' The WeChat post featured a Chinese drum performance, with Christmas symbols appearing only in

photos and the background. The reindeer, snowflake and elf costumes were still there, however, with Santa making an appearance at the end of the performance to wish everyone not a “Happy or Merry Christmas,” (like in their 2017 Christmas Show) but a “Happy, healthy and prosperous New Year,” proof that even Private2 kindergarten is starting to align with the official discourse of distancing itself from Western cultural products, Christmas being the most targeted. Moreover, on Private2’s website Christmas was not featured at all after the academic year 2017-2018, management deciding to promote more patriotic activities, like the “Let’s sing red songs” or “We love our national flag” events.

7.3 The Centre’s increased control over private kindergartens: Performing patriotism and traditional Chinese culture

In this section I briefly tackle the extent to which values and citizenship education is disseminated in Space3 through patriotic events like China’s National Day and the celebration of traditional Chinese culture during the Spring Festival. As both are Chinese kindergartens catering to Chinese citizens it was expected for them to celebrate local festivals, but I was keen on assessing whether Chinese or Western holidays took centre stage. Private1 and Private2 use imported curricula which promote Western culture and thus emphasise foreign holidays, so Chinese culture had a perfunctory role in lesson plans and annual events, even around the 19th National Congress. The only kindergarten affected by Space1’s push for an increased presence of moral education, particularly patriotism, was Private1, but Principal Stella (PR1K19) did not change the curriculum but included more Chinese elements and ensured the kindergarten exhibited political correctness on social media, thus negotiating with Space1.1 and allowing its (foreign) teachers to continue to promote Western narratives in the classroom.

Thus, in Private1 China’s National Day was merged with the Mid-Autumn Festival in 2017 and, even though the open-day activity was organised by a Chinese teacher it did not see the scale or core activities I noted in Space2. In my interview with Teacher Nina (PR1K21) she explained she did not want to emphasise patriotic rituals but traditional culture, as she felt young children could have more fun by being exposed to traditional dances, music and artisans than a military parade or “*boring speeches*.” While this was her candid answer, of interest is her word choice in the activity proposal she submitted, where she described the event’s aim as “*an excellent opportunity to promote the Chinese nation’s 5,000-year-old history [...] Culture is the root of the nation, and this festival is an important carrier for the inheritance of national culture, vigorously promoting the outstanding traditions of national culture and inheriting the national spirit.*” As documentation submitted in Mandarin could be reviewed by the local education bureau during annual inspections, Teacher Nora opted to act as on ‘obedient body’ and exhibited sanctioned behaviour (Foucault 1995).

Even though it is an inclusive private kindergarten Private1 did not celebrate the national day with a raising of the flag ceremony or listening to the national anthem, nor did it have senior class children march in uniform or invite local Party members to give a speech. According to Teacher Anna (PR1K20), the preschool never organised such activities, preferring to cultivate patriotism in what she labelled as “*more age-appropriate means*” like making a China collage and learning about the country’s different landmarks and foods. In addition, Teacher Nora (PR1K21) explain that, as the event organiser, her goal was to make children experienced a festive atmosphere to better understand China’s traditional culture. She created an immersive cultural environment where children and artists wore national costumes, appreciated folk music and a dragon dance performance, as well as made Chinese knots and ate moon cakes together (Table 7.7 below). In her K2 class she also invited some volunteer parents to help the children make moon cakes and celebrate together. Another activity saw the

teachers perform a play in English entitled the “Mystery to the Moon,” based on the folktale of “Hou Yi Shooting the Sun.”

Private2 did not celebrate China’s National Day by organising a grand event in 2017, which is a strong indicator that it was resisting the Centre’s pressure for a more patriotic discourse around the 19th National Congress. According to Principal Rosie (PR2K23) the only local festival her kindergarten celebrated through an open-day event was the Spring festival, as their IB curriculum focuses on topic like the environment or technology and Western holidays. Teacher Ella (PR2K24) shared that Private2 only celebrated the national day by having the children make a flag and talk about Chinese landmarks and that they never invited Party members to give speeches or held a military parade, as they pride themselves on nurturing a multicultural environment.

This positioning changed radically in the 2018-2019 academic year, as the kindergarten organised a China Week which it heavily promoted online. I found three posts related to China’s National day on the kindergarten’s official website in September 2018, showcasing patriotic activities under the titles “Let’s sing red songs” and “We love our national flag,” as well as a Chinese snacks activity. The first event explained how children were exposed to a patriotic narrative by viewing senior class children dressed in military uniform parading while carrying the national flag, behaviour which is proof that this kindergarten has fallen in line with and is conforming with the national discourse. Moreover, the children, many wearing red clothes and waving the national flag or with a flag sticker on their cheeks watched a video of soldiers raising the national flag in Tian’An Men Square, wrapping up the event by singing patriotic songs. The second noteworthy event saw the children wear traditional Chinese attire and make themed crafts like the national flag, as well as taking part in a flag-raising ceremony. This activity had the purpose of helping the children “*develop a deeper love for their own country,*” ritualistic behaviour to cultivate the “socialist builders of tomorrow.”

Private1 organised a half-day Chinese New Year activity, not putting much emphasis on this festival as it had already promoted traditional culture with its Mid-Autumn Festival celebration, as well as “*needing a break after the month-long effort that went into preparing for the Christmas Concert*” (PR1K22). According to Chinese Teacher Anna (PR1K20), while her kindergarten mainly disseminates Western culture, she is always keen to make sure her senior class is also aware of China’s own exquisite cultural heritage, like the Analects of Confucius, which she sees as “*the quintessence of China. We should all learn them first before a foreign language or culture. We should not throw our Chinese legacy away and be crazy about foreign things.*” However, as this is a private kindergarten using a Western curriculum and with a bilingual English-Mandarin stream she is aware that they focus on Western festivals, as “*this is what the parents are paying high tuition fees for, not Chinese holidays that they can celebrate at home.*”

During the 2017 Spring Festival the kindergarten invited the parents to join their children in making dumplings and eating them during a ‘family reunion’ lunch, while in some classroom volunteer parents showed off their calligraphy and Chinese painting skills (Table 7.8). The teachers talked to the children about the customs related to this festival, which everyone was familiar with, like receiving lucky money, wearing new clothes, hanging spring couplets and greeting their elders using appropriate wishes like “May you come into good fortune.” Similar to the activities I observed in Space3, the children also watched a video explaining the meaning of the Chinese zodiac and, to welcome the Year of the Dog, made simple origami dogs.

In Private2 the Chinese New Year was also a restrained affair, with the kindergarten preparing a calligraphy activity where senior class children wrote the Chinese character for luck (*fu* 福), then decorated their classrooms and the corridors with their art. As expected, the children arrived at kindergarten wearing traditional garb and had fun making traditional crafts.

This event was covered on the kindergarten's website in a post brimming with pictures of smiling children, but with very little content. I observed their Lantern Festival activity on 22nd February, as the kindergarten was decorated with Chinese lanterns. The teachers organised a Chinese lantern show, where each classroom got to present their best lanterns, as well as a riddle activity where children had to guess each other's riddle and the winner got a small award (Table 7.9). The parents also came to kindergarten in the afternoon, making tangyuan with their children and solving riddles together.

Overall, in 2017 Space3 did not prioritise the celebration of China's National Day, neither kindergarten organising a military parade or inviting local Party officials, focusing instead on the Mid-Autumn Festival, with its customary dances, folk music and mooncake. Because of its status as an inclusive private kindergarten Private1 was careful to promote a politically correct image on social media, conforming to Space1's request for more patriotic and traditional Chinese events, but Private2 remained unaffected, promoting its Western festival activities like Christmas. However, starting with 2018 Private2 also conformed with the official rhetoric by emphasising patriotic activities and balancing its foreign festivals with Chinese events, proof that the Centre's control over the narratives both public and private kindergartens construct in the public space has considerably tightened.

7.4 Conclusion

Applying Foucault's sovereign and disciplinary power concepts, this chapter looked at why private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens remain on the periphery of the Centre-driven homogenising discourse on ECE and how local and global forces are interacting in the internalisation and dissemination of moral education and Halloween and Christmas-related cultural practices. To assess local forces - the expression of Beijing's 'social constructionism' in the disciplinary setting of private kindergartens - I analysed the patriotic celebration of China's National Day and the traditional Spring Festival, while as global cultural constructs I looked at Halloween and Christmas.

The first step to gauge the control or lack thereof the Centre exerts over Space3 with the aim of "*strengthening moral education to cultivate people*" (*lideshuren* 立德树人), as well as the barriers it set up to curb the spread of foreign culture was to look for evidence in key ECE legislation at national and local level, then assess its effects on Private1 and Private2 curricula and key celebrations. The subsequent sections, assessing the impact of negative power, addressed four levels of analysis, mirroring the structure of the findings chapters for public kindergartens (Table 7.1 below).

As follows, I began by looking at relevant information from the 2010 Education Reform, then focused on local level legislation through the four consecutive *STYAPS* constructing Shanghai's ECE landscape. Next, to understand how this legislation was being perceived and implemented by government officials, I analysed three interviews with local education officials, one from the SEB and two from the MEB, the district where both observed private bilingual kindergartens are located. As expected, their views and oftentimes their verbiage mimicked that of the dominant discourse, but candid moments offered precious insight into how national and local ECE legislation is shaping private kindergartens in Shanghai.

Neither national nor local policies targeting private kindergartens placed limits on the international curricula they could use, but overall ECE legislation does ideologically align with Xi Jinping Thought, with the latest legislation specifically targeting citizenship and moral education, including the dissemination of the 12 core socialist values (tackled at length in Chapter 4). However, my interviews with education officials Huang (EO1) and Bai (EO2) revealed that Space1.1 believes its annual monitoring of curricula used in private kindergartens,

even those with ‘Western’ immersive environments and English instruction, is enough to ensure that the children are exposed to the ‘right’ discourse, which nurtures patriotism. As China is an authoritarian state, repressive power is exerted through obvious surveillance mechanisms, like preschool inspections. Moreover, kindergarten staff may be monitored by teachers who are CCP members or the principals themselves (like in the case of the three public kindergartens observed), thus constructing a state of conscious visibility and self-censorship, with subjects exhibiting sanctioned behaviour while at work.

While Space 1.1 - the SEB and local education bureaus - is aware of the freedom private kindergartens have in choosing their curricula and teaching patterns, they only inspect them once a year and tolerate their alternative discourses, provided they follow the 2012 *Curriculum Guidelines*. I argue that the motivation behind allowing resistance to the dissemination of moral education as the core curricular component is the rising number of births since the 2015 *Two-child policy* and the local government’s commitment to 100% enrolment for kindergarten-aged hukou-holders by 2021. With there being a scarcity of public kindergartens (only 67% of the kindergartens in Shanghai, according to the 2019-2021 *STYAP*), the Centre is encouraging education entrepreneurs to open more kindergartens and using a ‘Western’ curriculum is an excellent selling point, thus driving up profit.

My hypothesis was that Space1 and its dominant discourse increased their influence over the two observed private kindergartens after the 19th National Congress, pressuring them to curb the dissemination of foreign narratives, especially those contained in the festival of Christmas. This was validated in the case of Private1, where both Principal Stella and Chinese Teachers Nora and Anna emphasised their commitment to Party rhetoric in interviews and behaved in line with what is expected of actors shaped by Beijing’s disciplinary power. However, at least during the academic year 2017-2018, Private2’s curriculum and activities, not just internally but also the way they were promoted on social media, remained unaffected, as I demonstrated in their celebration of both Halloween and Christmas, with both management and staff emphasising their pride in using an IB PYP curriculum.

As I labelled private kindergartens as the Space-on-the-Periphery of the homogenising official rhetoric cultivating ‘little socialist builders,’ where global counter-discourses are at work, I looked for supporting evidence by interviewing kindergarten staff, as well as by conducting parent questionnaires. In both Private1 and Private2, my analysis of the teachers, parents, and children’s perceptions of Halloween showed that the celebration of this originally European festival remained mostly unaffected by the dominant discourse, with the same quintessential rituals of a dress up parade, haunted house and spooky songs shaping both events. However, Private2 parents were more involved than their counterparts in Private1, and only the latter decided to cover this activity on its official WeChat account, while Private1’s Principal Stella opted to only share it on her kindergarten’s private app. Also, Western teacher Vicky disclosed that Halloween in 2017 was a single day event, while in previous years it used to last at least a week, with Private1 deciding to focus on promoting a Chinese festival (the Double Ninth Festival) and Sports Day that October (PR1K22), decision which I interpret as proof that this inclusive private kindergarten has become more reticent in promoting foreign festivals online, in favour of local ones. However, internally, the celebration of Halloween remained unaffected, with the bilingual stream children still being exposed to an American narrative of this holiday, courtesy of their American English teachers. Censorship only affected Private1’s public behaviour, as WeChat posts and websites are monitored by Space1, but classroom affairs and private kindergarten apps escape surveillance.

In the case of Christmas, Private1 again showed a stronger cooperation with Space1.1 and was more receptive to the Centre’s request to prioritise traditional Chinese festivals and patriotic events, at least in the narrative disseminated on social media. Hence, their most significant annual event shifted from a carols-driven Christmas Concert into a culture-neutral

Winter Concert showcasing a balance of foreign and Chinese performances, with management asking foreign teachers to not wish the audience a “Happy Christmas” and deciding not to advertise this activity online. As the purpose of elite private kindergartens in Shanghai is the generation of profit (Schulte 2017), and their main selling point is a ‘Western’ or ‘Western’-inspired curriculum (e.g. ME5), bilingual English-Mandarin streams attract potential students by heavily advertising themselves locally, both by organising events that stand out in the community and by maintaining an enticing online presence (e.g. PR2K23). Not posting anything about its Halloween or Christmas events is evidence that Private1 kindergarten is slowly losing its privileged position on the Periphery and shifting towards a position on the Space-in-Between, growing closer to the conforming behaviour of public kindergartens, whose curriculum and activities are shaped by the Centre.

By analysing Private2’s WeChat posts I managed to get an informed perspective on the curriculum and teaching pattern this kindergarten used in the academic year 2017-2018, which I complemented with teacher interviews, a short parent questionnaire and observations of key festivals. Private2’s WeChat presence shows a mixture of predominantly ‘Western’ celebrations and major Chinese festivals, as well as the occasional activity that reflects the kindergarten’s IB curriculum. These bilingual English-Mandarin posts heavily promoted their foreign curriculum via key celebrations like Easter, Christmas and Halloween, each having at least one entry. Even though Private1 took a step back from advertising its ‘Western’ culture-related activities in late 2017, Private2 did not do so, as, according to spokesperson Teacher Ella (PR2K24), the 19th National Congress had not affected the kindergarten in the slightest. Private2 covered its Christmas celebration in a series of posts, the star being their annual Christmas Show, where the performances disseminated mostly mainstream American culture and were imbued with festival-specific phrases and visuals.

My interviews with the three Chinese private kindergarten teachers strongly indicate they ideologically align with the Centre, all of them believing in teaching traditional Chinese culture and patriotic values. The only group I found to be unaffected by sovereign or disciplinary power was the foreign teachers, who, as native English speakers, resisted the dominant discourse because of ignorance of local legislation and because their identity had been shaped by Western discourses. Thus, on the one hand, these subjects received no training on ECE regulations in Shanghai, nor any guidance regarding what values and cultural elements they could disseminate in class. Secondly, they do not speak Mandarin, nor were they raised in China, so they are not subjected to Beijing’s surveillance and control.

Moreover, during my observations and from interviews with teaching staff and management I discovered that the dissemination of ‘Western’ cultural practices and their intrinsic values is not homogeneous across the observed kindergartens, but chaotic and heavily reliant on the individual preferences and choices of each foreign teacher, who have great freedom in choosing their lesson content and teaching pattern. From talking with Teachers Vicky of Private1 and George of Private2 kindergarten, I found out they are responsible for writing daily and weekly lesson plans that are in line with the kindergartens’ overall curricula, but there is a widespread lack of supervision and it is up to the teachers to decide what they actually teach in class and throughout the day.

In my analysis of the dissemination of values and citizenship in the academic year 2017-2017 I reached the conclusion that Space3 did not prioritise the celebration of either China’s National Day or the Spring Festival beyond organising perfunctory activities, where only basic rituals were performed. As follows, both Private1 and Private2 chose to promote traditional Chinese culture through the Mid-Autumn Festival instead of patriotism during China’s National Day, the latter being devoid of the ubiquitous military parade or speeches given by Party members I observed in Space2. Because Private1 is an inclusive private kindergarten renting its premises from the local government and receiving subsidies for each child enrolled

in its local stream, it negotiated with the Centre and, while it continued to celebrate foreign holidays it cultivated a politically correct image on social media by mostly promoting traditional Chinese events. In contrast, Private2 remained unaffected and did not mention China's National Day at all in 2017. However, starting with 2018 it also aligned with the dominant discourse, heavily showcasing patriotic activities like "Let's sing red songs" and balancing its foreign festivals with Chinese events, evidence that Space1's control over the narratives both public and private kindergartens construct in the public space has considerably tightened after the *shijiuda*.

To conclude, my findings are consistent with Foucault's account of sovereign and disciplinary power, the first exerting direct, repressive control over subjects, and the latter acting in more subtle ways to construct "*trained and docile bodies*" (1991). In the case of China, a post-socialist Leninist state, power is mostly exercised in a crude manner, with increased juridical control over the nationalisation of ECE, but there are also some instances of disciplinary power at work, for example the citizens' internalisation of the view that one's value is defined by the accumulation of 'numeric capital' (Woronov 2016), and thus where being enrolled in a well-ranked kindergarten makes you a 'better' person. The Chinese subjects I interviewed and observed within the spatial boundaries of the ECE system, namely local education officials and kindergarten staff, are tightly bound to the Centre and expressed ideological conformity with Beijing's neotraditionalist narrative of 'Chineseness,' where a good patriot is loyal to the CCP. While this is an expected finding within the context of an authoritarian state, my anthropological lens adds dimension to how power works in shaping alignment and is a window into how elite Shanghainese preschools engage with culture and identity. The upper middle-class parents who opted for these top private kindergartens, however, resist a moral education-driven kindergarten milieu for their children by opting for bilingual English-Mandarin programmes which expose their progeny to what they think is 'Western' education. Lastly, the native English teachers subtracted themselves completely from the disciplinary techniques and mechanisms shaping the first three because they cannot speak Mandarin and were not familiar with local ECE regulations. Moreover, the interviewed kindergarten management, as well as the Chinese teachers I came in contact with spoke limited English, which gave the foreign teachers the playroom they needed in choosing their lesson content, especially as they received limited training regarding what was expected of them curriculum-wise.

The data collected through the parent questionnaires showed that parents were not motivated by having an increased degree of agency regarding what their children were learning when choosing a private kindergarten and that they were content with letting the kindergarten decide on the curriculum and teaching pattern, only participating in kindergarten life by occasionally taking part in events. However, their decision to enrol their children in elite private kindergartens with bilingual curricula instead of top public ones, coupled with their willingness to pay high tuition fees are examples of their agency. In their case, Hass' (1996) critique of Foucault's social constructionism as not affecting all the subjects exposed to the dominant discourse to the same extent perfectly explains why this group chose private Mandarin-Chinese kindergarten for their children, where the latter would also be exposed to other cultures, instead of the Chinese curriculum used in elite public kindergartens.

Overall, in this chapter I explained why I label bilingual English-Mandarin private kindergartens as the Space-on-the-Periphery, still existing outside the Centre's control over curriculum and implicit ideological dissemination because of the native English teachers' agency in promoting their respective cultural narratives in the classroom. Moreover, Space1 allows private kindergartens to use 'Western' curricula and teachers to support the development of the private preschool sector and reach 100% enrolment of all kindergarten-aged resident children by 2021.

8. Conclusion: Elite Shanghainese Kindergartens - Narratives of Alignment and Resistance

Durkheim (1961) defines education as a socialisation process, as it creates political subjects who align themselves with a cohesive morality and world views. During our school years we don't just learn subject-related knowledge, but also acquire an understanding of how the world around us operates, as well as internalise a system of values. We learn what is moral and immoral, and we also learn our duties as citizens. In this thesis I looked at contemporary narratives on moral education (*deyu* 德育) in China and the way they are constructed, internalised, and disseminated within the spatiality of elite public and private kindergartens in Shanghai. Based on the assumption that education functions as a 'social factory' that moulds new citizens, I chose to focus on assessing the power dynamics shaping ECE, the first stage of human development. Within the constructed borders of five kindergartens, I applied the dual lens of sovereign power for observing the direct, crude effects ECE legislation has on a variety of subjects, and disciplinary power to capture the more subtle mechanisms of power that regulate their identity-formation and subsequent behaviour.

To achieve my goal, I observed the preschools' celebration of four key holidays during the academic year 2017-2018, with China's National Day and the Spring Festival as expressions of local forces disseminating patriotism and traditional Chinese values, core components of Xi Jinping's "*strengthening moral education to cultivate people*" (*lideshuren* 立德树人) rhetoric, and Halloween and Christmas as globalisation-generated constructs promoting 'Western' cultural practices (Forbes 2015; Whiteley 2008). My overall research aim was to understand *how the interplay between local and global forces has been shaping ECE since the 2010 Education Reform, how and why the dominant discourse has become increasingly keen on promoting values and citizenship education after the 19th National Congress, and whether its strategy has been effective in disseminating the core socialist values in public and private kindergartens*. I framed my analysis by using Foucault's account of sovereign and disciplinary power and looked at both hierarchical power dynamics shaping Chinese ECE – the consequence of sovereign power controlling subjects in an authoritarian state, and horizontal relations between members of Shanghai's socio-cultural elite, where social power as disciplinary power is shaping them as 'docile bodies' (1991), but also generated resistance to the homogenising dominant discourse promoting a monolithic vision of 'Chineseness.'

Foucault argued that power is embedded in every aspect of social life and thus, diffused (e.g. Daldal 2014). I purposefully used a binary relationship in the way Gramsci saw power relations (Gramsci 1980; Germain and Kenny 1998), namely local socialist forces and global ones, to come up with a viable research question. Moreover, building on Foucault's concept of "*social power as not a top-down flow from elites to masses [...] but operating in a dense network throughout the everyday social world*" (Stoddart 2007: 211), connected with the ubiquitous possibility of resistance, I captured State-society power dynamics in China within the spatiality of five elite kindergartens.

Beijing uses 'ideological power,' in this analysis moral education, to achieve the voluntary submission of its citizens through various mechanisms of both external (legislation and associated repressive practices) and internal discipline, the latter mostly used within the school and family (Daldal 2014: 159). Canon examples of disciplinary power at work are prisons and factories (Foucault 1991; O'Neill 1986), but I decided to look at elite kindergartens as privileged spaces for observing how the Centre is exerting control over the "*techniques for the administration of corporeal, attitudinal and behavioural discipline*" (O'Neill 1986: 47), with principals, teachers, and parents expected to behave like 'obedient bodies' aligned with

the dominant discourse and raise their children as ‘socialist builders.’ In his 10th September 2018 speech at the National Conference on Education, Xi emphasised the necessity for educators to “*lay a solid foundation for training socialist builders and successors with all-round moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour development*” within the institution of the school, where the regime can control the dissemination of a homogenous understanding of a ‘good child,’ a *sujet* thinking and behaving as a loyal citizen.

The CCP has a pluralistic ethical system, as it had to fill the void caused by a lack of religion with a combination of collectivism, Confucianism, and, most recently under the leadership of Xi Jinping, with nationalism, the key component in his moral education discourse. However, in both the national and local ECE legislation I analysed I could find no cohesive view on nationalism per se, just the mention of incorporating the spirit of The Three Represents, Xi Jinping Thought, and the 12 core socialist values into ECE curricula and quotidian kindergarten activities. To understand the mechanisms cultivating young patriots shaped by “*strengthening education in ideals and beliefs [...] and confidence in the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system*” (2010 Outline, Strategic Objectives and Themes) I looked at the dissemination of what I label ‘values and citizenship education,’ which I define as the core dimensions of *lideshuren* (立德树人). The Centre sees the ‘training [of] socialist builders and successors’ as the ultimate programmatic task of education in China (Li et al. 2004; Wang 2018), where patriotic behaviour is instilled by ‘developing great virtue’ through performing patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, as well as ‘obeying social morality,’ the latter dimension encompassing the 12 core socialist values. I analysed the interactions between the Centre and public and private kindergartens within the constraints of values and citizenship education, or the first two facets of moral education, disregarding the third, ‘keeping personal morals’ (Xue and Jian 2020), the latter being the object of Xu’s 2017 book, *The Good Child: Moral Development in a Chinese Preschool*.

In *Discipline and Punish* (whose original 1975 title is *Surveiller et Punir*), Foucault borrows Bentham’s metaphor of the Panopticon (1995) to describe the development of disciplinary institutions in Western societies in the 19th and 20th centuries, which I applied to a kindergarten setting located in a contemporary authoritarian state. However, China mostly has explicit top-down mechanisms of power to control its population, so the dominant lens I employed was that of looking at how sovereign power is constructing identities. As follows, in the three observed public kindergartens the staff’s attitude and behaviour regarding the dominant discourse was monitored by the principals, the latter all having close ties with the CCP and heavily promoting *deyu* (德育), which also spilled over to the parents, who willingly relinquished their agency within preschool borders. In addition, because they are part of the business Establishment (*shiyè biānzhì* 事业编制), so their respective district education bureau (ES4), all public kindergarten teachers have the potential to carry out surveillance over their peers and preschool activities and are implicitly shaped by bureaucratic control. This apparatus applies to inclusive private kindergartens, where at least one member of staff (and usually also the principal and/or vice-principal) are active in the local Party branch (ES4).

The panoptic surveillance exercised in Chinese preschools remains obvious compared to more subtle avenues of disciplinary power shaping various modern institutions in democratic countries. As follows, the regime is nationalising ECE through didactic and prescriptive legislation (like the *2018 Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers*), as well as through local Party branches actively encouraging preschool teachers to incorporate more patriotic activities into their lessons (see the *2018 Kindergarten Party Branch Plan*). This conspicuous indoctrination is backed up with sanctions for what the Centre perceives as ideological deviance and elicits self-censorship in the observed subjects (as observed in the ‘Sinicisation’ of Halloween and Christmas activities).

Another manifestation of disciplinary power is the Shanghai (SEB) and local education bureaus performing unannounced annual inspections to ensure kindergartens are conforming with local regulations and curricular requirements, coupled with the monitoring of their official social media accounts. I look at social media as a ‘virtual Panopticon’ where the sharing of content becomes a performative act, as I have demonstrated through my analysis of both public and private kindergartens’ cultural activities. The narratives constructed and disseminated on official kindergarten WeChat accounts are visible to a global audience and thus rely on a self-reflexing structure, as subjects self-regulate and self-censor their behaviour by selecting and framing content with the aim of pleasing a target audience, in the case of this analysis Space1 and the parents.

A more elusive instance for analysing the State’s control over shaping identities and where Foucault’s disciplinary power lens brings added depth is the pervasive use of ranking to ‘grade’ citizens by measuring their ‘quality,’ avenue explored by Woronov (2006) in her anthropological study of vocational schools in China. Chinese citizens continue to be moulded by the logic of ‘numeric capital,’ where one’s exam scores, for example, are synonymous with their moral value. Attending a ‘well-ranked’ preschool makes a child ‘good’ and is a source of prestige for both the subject and their family, uplifting their position in what is seen as a hierarchical society. Despite the Centre’s legislative commitment for more ‘inclusive’ education (see the *2019-2021 STYAP*), sorting mechanisms and hierarchies remain deeply embedded in Chinese society, with Shanghai being no exception. On the contrary, even in a vanguard city like China ‘numeric capital’ remains quintessential in identity-formation and starts in kindergarten. Despite what local officials shared with me regarding kindergarten ranking becoming obsolete in Shanghai in the near future (EO2), so as to fulfil the local government’s pledge for inclusive education (for every kindergarten to be a ‘good’ kindergarten), there is little indication this is going to happen. Shanghai is shaped by fierce competition and the parents I spoke with are willing to do whatever it takes to make sure their offspring have the ‘best’ starting point in life, which for them means attending ‘the best’ kindergarten and ‘the best’ training centre to set them on the path to ‘success.’

In opposition to Gramsci (1980), who, from his positionality as a Marxist locates power in a centralised agency only, Foucault diffuses power relations and focuses on capturing not so much the ‘why’ but the ‘how’ by which we become subjects through power relations (Daldal 2014: 161), which in this thesis I artificially constrain to kindergartens, situated on the Periphery of the dominant discourse on education. Using Foucault’s power theory applied to education (Foucault 1991; Hass 1996; Deacon 2006; Ball 2013), I argued that ECE had evolved on the margin of official rhetoric regarding education until the 2010 Education Reform, when the State began to take an interest in exerting more control over curricula and teaching patterns, objective which intensified after the 19th National Congress of 2017. I confirmed my hypothesis by analysing both national and local level ECE legislation since 2010, filtering key documents for references to moral education and proposed ideological guidelines, with documents like the *2019-2021 Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (STYAP)* and *Ten Guidelines for Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers in the New Era* (2018) emphasising the need for the cultivation of patriotic citizens - both children and teachers – and public kindergartens using a 70-80% core curriculum developed under the guidance of the SEB (the Learning Activity teacher’s manual issued by Shanghai Education Publishing).

To answer my three-fold research question I constructed a thematic spatiality analytical framework inspired by Starr (2005) (Fig. 1.1), where I labelled Beijing and its reaching arms at local level, the SEB and local education bureaus, as well as district Party branches as Space1 – the Centre, the three elite public kindergartens I observed as Space2, between the margin and the Centre, and the two private bilingual kindergartens as Space3, situated on the Periphery. While I maintain that ECE remains on the periphery of the education system compared with

compulsory and higher education, in Shanghai the local government has taken more interest in this sector, with four rounds of STYAPs (especially the last) defining it as ‘public welfare inclusive’ (*gongyi puhui* 公益普惠), as well as asking both public and private kindergartens to increase the presence of moral education in their curricula and activities, while concomitantly limiting the promotion of ‘Western’ cultural content, especially Christmas. Starting with the 2010 Education Reform but gaining more impetus after the 19th National Congress, Space1 has been aiming at homogenising core educational content for ECE (see Chapter 4), with both public and private preschools conforming to this directive based on the narratives promoted in their social media posts.

Relying on a multitude of data sources, from direct observation of preschool events and lessons during the academic year 2017-2018, interviews and parent questionnaires to analysing key ECE legislation and kindergarten social media accounts and curricula (including weekly lesson plans) I showed that Space2 is shaped by both sovereign and disciplinary power and that both staff and parents behave as ‘obedient bodies’ (Foucault 1991), fully aligned with the official rhetoric’s push for moral education. As “*the major effect of the Panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power*” (Foucault 1991: 201) within the spatiality of kindergartens neither subject resists. Proof are the politically correct and pragmatic answers I received in both interviews and parent questionnaires regarding the importance of promoting patriotism and traditional Chinese culture, as well as by the emphasis on patriotic and Chinese festivals in kindergarten activities (see Chapter 5). Regarding the dissemination of foreign culture via the celebration of Halloween and Christmas, there is only weak societal agency in Space2: Public2 chose to ignore both events, constructing its original New Year Dress up Parade, Public1 exposed its local stream to only superficial, spill over activities organised in its international classes, and Public3 overlooked Christmas and performed Halloween as a culture neutral ‘fun day’ (see Chapter 6).

However, the reason why I defined these level one grade one public kindergartens as the *Space-in-Between* the Centre and the Periphery is because I also observed resistance to the Centre’s control. For example, teachers integrated specific rituals like trimming a Christmas tree, Santa bringing gifts and children in costume going trick-or-treating into kindergarten activities to satisfy the parents’ preferences. However, to escape Space1’s surveillance they also reconstructed ‘Western’ rituals by introducing Chinese cultural elements and not promoting these events on social media. I argue that this behaviour is becoming more common as Xi is pushing for the nationalisation of education in China, including ECE. There is now a contradiction between market demands for global cultural constructs and State policy disseminating moral education, but at the same time striving for global human resources (Vickers 2021). In addition, most parents exposed their children to foreign cultural practices though Halloween (63%) and Christmas-related (85%) activities held at home, with 92% of respondents also enrolling them in extracurricular English classes taught by native speakers. Regarding the children, the target of both negative and positive power shaping ECE after the Reform, my observations of their attitudes and behaviour during events related to the four key celebrations (particularly coming through in the vignettes included in this thesis) indicate their internalisation of local traditions and patriotic rituals, as well as a superficial understanding of Halloween and Christmas.

Applying the same triangulation method, I placed the private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens I observed (Space3) on the Periphery, as they resist disciplinary power by using international curricula and teaching patterns, like Private1’s P4C (Philosophy for Children) and Private2’s accredited IB PYP (Primary Years Programme), thus creating liberal spaces of interaction with the Centre’s homogenising, moral education-driven discourse. Furthermore, the *Space-on-the-Periphery* employs native English teachers and allows them a

great degree of agency in disseminating ‘Western’ culture, phenomenon the Centre has so far ignored. Contrary to expectations that parents have more to say in private education (Lin 2007; Goldring and Phillips 2008), while Space3 parents volunteered more often to help with activities compared with their counterparts in the three public kindergartens, they did not have a say in curriculum development or teaching pattern, deferring to the principals’ wishes (consistent with parents’ behaviour in Space2). Accordingly, their resistance to the socialist rhetoric’s cultivation of little patriots came in the form of choosing private kindergartens with an immersive ‘Western’ cultural environment. Moreover, 84% supplemented their children’s English learning by either teaching them at home or paying for a private tutor or training centre and the majority also celebrated both Halloween and Christmas (85%) at home.

I posited that Space1 continues to tolerate this resistance even after the 2010 Education Reform because of its commitment to the ordinary Chinese to make ECE a public good accessible to everyone, with the SEB needing to encourage the development of private kindergartens in order to reach full enrolment of residents in three years of affordable and quality preschool education by 2021. However, after the 19th National Congress, while both Private1 and Private2 continued to prioritise ‘Western’ festivals over Chinese ones and held opulent celebrations for both Halloween and Christmas, they also exhibited self-censorship in their social media posts. As follows, inclusive Private1 kindergarten, because of its close ties with its local education bureau and the owners’ Party affiliation stopped promoting these two festivals on its official WeChat account, preferring its password-protected app and private WeChat groups. Following the *shijiuda* this preschool went so far as to relabel its iconic ‘Christmas Concert’ into a ‘Winter Concert,’ as well as infuse it with a syncretic image by balancing carols with Chinese performances (including a patriotic military parade) and by replacing the expected “Happy Christmas” wishes with the culture neutral “Happy New Year.” During my fieldwork, Private2 management and teaching staff came across as unconcerned about the Centre tightening its control over the content it disseminated online and continued to ignore promoting local festivals in favour of extensive WeChat posts covering foreign holidays, especially Christmas. Nevertheless, its social media presence started to shift from 2018 onwards, aligning with Private1’s behaviour in support of a moral education driven narrative, as Chinese holidays presently balance ‘Western’ ones. In 2018 Private2 distanced itself from what could be viewed as ‘Western’ cultural labels Beijing is growing increasingly intolerant of (Fish 2017). Accordingly, the pragmatic solution was to rebrand its ‘Christmas Show’ into a ‘Winter’ one and ending the performance by wishing the audience a “Happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.”

However, based on my observations during visits to both kindergartens, as well as from my interviews with foreign staff, the dissemination of mostly American narratives of Halloween and Christmas remains unchanged in the classroom courtesy of the native English teachers. The latter are outside the reach of sovereign and disciplinary power both because of a language barrier and their unfamiliarity with China’s ethical and political system. State surveillance only affects Space3’s public behaviour, with official WeChat posts and websites experiencing self-censorship because of the potential of being monitored by Space1, but classroom affairs and private kindergarten apps escape this panoptic situation. Also, the dissemination of ‘Western’ festivals and their intrinsic values is not homogeneous across the observed kindergartens, but heavily reliant on the individual preferences of each Western teacher, who have great freedom in choosing their lesson content and teaching pattern. The children, while familiar with the significance of China’s National Day and customs associated with the Spring Festival, especially from their family, showed a deep understanding of both Halloween and Christmas related rituals, being able to discuss the festivals in English and having also celebrated at home.

Overall, using the theoretical framework of spatiality and Foucauldian state-society power dynamics I defined and analysed the local and global forces moulding preschool education since the 2010 Reform, namely the dominant discourse's emphasis on moral education through national and local legislation, as well as more subtle mechanisms of disciplinary power, and resistance through global narratives disseminated through 'Western' curricula prioritising the celebration of Halloween and Christmas, and native English teachers.

The reason why the Centre has increased its control over the promotion of values and citizenship education after the 19th National Congress has to do with Xi Jinping's consolidation of power and emphasis on moral education permeating every stage of education, as well as every aspect of people's lives. Thus, by promoting a neotraditionalist narrative of 'Chineseness,' (Vickers 2021) founded in the motto of "strengthening moral education to cultivate people," Xi aims at ensuring the Party's survival by nurturing socialist builders who are loyal to its ideology and envisioned future. But this vision is an egregious oversimplification of culture and identity, endangering plurality and difference. Thus, Chinese culture means different things depending on one's positioning, but what connected the interviewees was a core 'pride' in China's history, as well as its current role in the world, evidence that the Centre's homogenising narrative, as disseminated by the media and textbooks, is working. Meaning is constructed through an intersection of various cultural understandings and articulations, with homogenous narratives on kindergarten websites, official WeChat posts, and in lesson plans, but heterogeneous discourses in the classroom and at home. Many of the parents I spoke with are 'old Shanghainese,' so they exposed their children to local cultural practices like the Shanghainese language, while those from other parts of China also shared their regional cultural identity with their offspring. However, the regional identity of being 'Shanghainese' (also a reductionist stereotype) seemed to be seamlessly integrated into the overarching discourse promoting 'Chineseness,' as observed in local legislation (STYAPs promoting local culture) and during interviews.

Regarding the dissemination and internalisation of foreign culture, as cultural practices change and acquire new meaning as they travel, being reshaped by local flavours, Halloween and Christmas are being constructed as hybrid festivals. What I noticed was a phenomenon of cultural appropriation for the children: while their parents and teachers were clear that these festivals were 'foreign' and were seen as 'just a bit of fun,' the lines became blurred for the five- to six-year-olds I observed, especially in Private1 and Private2 kindergartens. Having been exposed to 'Western' festivals since the age of three, though their foreign (usually native English speaker) teachers, as well as by attending extracurricular English lessons at a variety of English training centres (with Disney English being quite popular), many children are confused as to the origin of these festivals. Cultural practices are transformed by a variety of factors, including consumer capitalism, and there is a clear hybridisation taking place in Shanghai, from Disneyland opening in Shanghai in 2016 to shopping malls celebrating both holidays since the 2010s.

However, after 2017, Beijing has started to 'crack down' on foreign festivals, especially Christmas, striving to forcefully insert itself into the natural effects of globalisation and forge a static narrative of 'Chinese' culture. The thesis discusses at length the impact of the *shijiuda* on kindergarten life, from new legislation pushing for a more patriotic staff to both Space2 and Space3 balancing Western cultural elements with Chinese ones and aligning with the dominant discourse in the public sphere. I restricted analysing Space1's strategy of disseminating moral education to values and citizenship education - so to the presence of the 12 core socialist values, especially patriotism, and traditional Chinese culture - and found that in Space2 the values were incorporated in their curricula (especially through the SEB-approved Learning Activity teacher's manual), and that both public and private preschools are putting more emphasis on patriotic events and Chinese festivals.

Moreover, in late July 2021, the government increased its control over educational content by passing a ban on for-profit private tuition in core school subjects (Reuters, 24 July 2021) to be implemented in pilot cities, including Shanghai. The legislation's title is a bit of a mouthful, but the State Council's positioning could not be clearer: *Guidelines for Further Easing the Burden of Excessive Homework and Off-campus Tutoring for Students at the Stage of Compulsory Education*. While private kindergartens are not directly affected by it, many private training centres went out of business, as teaching popular subjects like English and Maths became illegal. Shadow education, with popular names like English First, Wall Street English, OneSmart Education, and, targeting young children specifically, Disney English, was a booming sector in China, especially with Covid-19 preventing students from attending extracurricular lessons in person and such companies offering attractive online alternatives. More than 1000 companies were forced to close their doors (Al Jazeera English, 30 August 2021), their foreign teaching staff was made redundant, and parents asked for refunds for their pre-paid lesson packages. According to Xinhua News (24 July 2021), which mirrors the official discourse, the government's motivation for this ban is that the noxious culture of private lessons was putting a lot of financial pressure on parents, as well as needless stress on young learners. Thus, official rhetoric emphasised this was a 'double alleviation policy' which had the welfare of the ordinary Chinese at heart, with education authorities to fill the gap left by tutoring centres by offering free online learning services. The Centre's rhetoric is that this will reduce the cost of raising a child, incentivising parents to have a third offspring and add to the 'little socialist builders' to curb China's fast growing ageing population. However, there are voices who see this legislation as Beijing trying to control foreign investment in the education sector, which was significant in after-school tutoring companies (China Briefing, 27 September 2021), as well as force them to register as non-profit organisations (Reuters, 24 July 2021).

Connected to the object of my dissertation, the nationalising of ECE, the 2021 ban on for-profit tutoring is indicative that the Centre is also trying to control what knowledge is disseminated by private training schools. The 2021 *Guidelines* stipulate that off-campus tutoring cannot include any 'overseas education courses,' prohibit teaching on national festivals and holidays (Xinhua, 24 July 2021), and stop companies from hiring staff based outside of the country to carry out tutoring activities (China Briefing, 27 September 2021). While a socialist lens might construct the situation of after-school tuition as giving an unfair advantage to the wealthy and creating an education gap, and the ban on tutoring centres as promoting more 'inclusive' and 'quality' education (the latter ensured by free online classes local authorities are supposed to offer), in reality this measure will only exacerbate this divide. Many of the parents I interviewed in 2017-2018 already had one-to-one English teaching arrangements in place for their child, so the government's move will mostly serve to increase inequality in terms of English language skills. Based on conversations I had in February 2021 with two good Shanghainese friends who are involved in ECE, well-off parents are now using private WeChat groups to organise small-group online sessions for their children, taught by qualified native English teachers. Some of these teachers work in education locally, hired by bilingual or international schools, and make some money on the side by tutoring at the weekend. The black market for private lessons in Shanghai is booming, with parents using word-of-mouth to recommend native English teachers to their friends. Moreover, the Covid-pandemic normalised online lessons, so there is a certain level of safety and anonymity when having a class with the camera turned off on Zhumu, for example. For braver training centres and parents, some tutoring companies have switched to weekend lessons in art, music, or drama on paper, but actually deliver classes in core school subjects to clients they have known for a long time and deem trustworthy. More cosmopolitan parents can also use international teaching platforms to hire online teachers directly from native English-speaking countries, thus easily circumventing the ban.

I argue that this legislation will positively influence elite bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens in Shanghai, as an increased number of affluent parents will now be interested in providing an immersive ‘Western’ learning environment for their offspring. These preschools can still hire native English teachers and, with legal avenues for private tuition closed to many parents, they will be willing to pay higher tuition fees for legal solutions.

Regarding my original contribution, this thesis is an empirical study of the embodiment of power as it is achieved in educational institutions, namely in elite public and private kindergartens catering to Shanghai’s upper middle class, as well as, to a small extent, in the lives of families.

I look at kindergarten staff, parents and children vis-à-vis their perception, internalisation and dissemination of patriotism, traditional Chinese culture, and foreign culture, assessed within the artificially constructed borders of China’s National Day, the Spring Festival, Halloween, and Christmas celebrations. Drawing on a multitude of data sources, from official ECE documents, kindergarten social media posts and curricula to direct observation of preschool activities, 25 semi-structured interviews and 188 parent questionnaires my dissertation presents a comprehensive analysis of ECE realities in Shanghai, especially how values and citizenship education and Halloween and Christmas-related cultural practices intertwine in shaping different subjects.

Using my previous work experience as an English teacher at various leading preschools in Shanghai, combined with my academic background in political science and global history, I applied the filter of values and citizenship education to understand the complex power relations between the Centre and ordinary Chinese citizens within the spatiality of five top public and private kindergarten. My theoretical contribution to research builds on Foucault’s power theory – both as sovereign and disciplinary power (Foucault 1969; 1980; 1981; 1983; 1990; 1991; 2008), more specifically the relation between education and power (Deacon 2006; Ball 2013), as I construct Shanghai kindergartens as spaces on the margin of the official discourse on education, which aims at homogenising moral education across China. Moreover, I use Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power (1991) to understand the attitudes and behaviours of various actors – education officials, kindergarten principals, Chinese and Western teachers, as well as senior class parents and, to a small extent, children, in their alignment with and resistance to “*strengthening moral education to cultivate people*” (*lideshuren*). My findings showed that public kindergartens conformed with and internalised the Party-driven narrative and mirrored its patriotic propaganda, while private and bilingual English-Mandarin preschools remain the only places of resistance. Space3 continues to resist the nationalisation of ECE because of market demands for ‘Western’ cultural immersion.

I also discussed how, as early as kindergarten, Chinese children embark on a process of socialisation aimed at ‘training’ them to become moral citizens, an approach that focuses on the content of education, especially the dissemination of the 12 core socialist values and traditional Chinese culture. I also employed the hidden curriculum approach, which does not look at the explicit content of curricula - the educational content, but at the implicit one, which generates systems of discipline. More specifically, I observed activities related to four key festivals to get a better understanding of what the children are taught, as well as, to a limited extent, how they respond to this discourse.

For example, the similar attitude of the interviewed Chinese teachers, who behaved like ‘obedient bodies’ when ideologically aligning themselves with the Centre and, at times, verbatim mirroring the patriotic syntagms used by patriotic propaganda evidences the way Chinese education operates like a system of discipline teaching its subjects to accept hierarchies and acquiesce to the status quo. I argue that this is an intended outcome of the Centre, to normalise a certain hierarchy which will ensure the survival of an authoritarian system in China under the leadership of the CCP. My analysis of both explicit and implicit ECE processes in

the five observed kindergartens, as well as related national and local legislation generates a multilateral picture on the experience of kindergarten education in Shanghai in both a public and private setting.

To conclude, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the field of comparative education, in general, and Chinese ECE, in particular. It provides useful reflections that contribute to the understanding of the Centre's current national strategy of using ECE as an integral stepping stone in the creation of a harmonious society by cultivating patriotic citizens. Capturing the dynamic between societal forces of alignment and resistance to the homogenising dominant discourse in both public and private kindergartens, I create a complex narrative of contemporary Chinese society.

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Appendices

Table 1.1 The 2010 Education Reform: Macro-level documents

English and Mandarin document name		Abbreviation
1.1	National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) 中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010-2020年）	The Development Plan
1.2	Outline of National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) 国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010-2020年）	The Outline
1.3	Several opinions of the State Council on the current development of preschool education (2010) 国务院关于当前发展学前教育的若干意见 (2010年)	State Council Opinions
1.4	National Guidelines for Early Childhood Learning and Development (2010) 年国家颁布幼儿学习与发展指南 (2010年)	The Guidelines

Table 2.1 ECE policy domains and dimensions with linkages to China

ECE Policy Domains	ECE Policy Dimensions	Further Questions for China
1. National goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the extent of ECE provisions - universal or localised access - the ages of children served - the auspice under which the programmes operate- Ministry of Social affairs/ Ministry of Education - the policy target (child/ parent/ community) - the quality of services, - regulatory concerns, - financing strategies, - types of setting, e.g. public/private kindergartens - cultural content: values that the state wishes to instil into the young generation 	<p>Is ECE universal in China? Under whose auspices does ECE fall? Who finances public ECE in China? (national and provincial interactions) What is the ratio of public to private kindergartens? What is the quality of Chinese ECE in China, and in Shanghai in particular? What are the ‘core Chinese values’ and the Western values being disseminated through ECE? How is the State reconstructing Confucian values?</p>
2. ECE patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pedagogical emphasis: overall development or school learning - traditional: child-centred (Montessori, Steiner, Gardner’s multiple intelligences) and play-based (Piaget and Froebel) - emerging: sociocultural (Vygotsky), inquiry-driven (Reggio Emilia), postmodern, and critical 	<p>What specific ECE patterns are used in China? Since 1979 national policies aimed at imitation of Western patterns, with the 21st century seeing a hybridization of Western and ‘traditional’ methods. What are the aims of the Three-Year Action Plan in Shanghai?</p>

3. ECE curricula	- Framework, consultative - Central, competency-oriented	What is the public kindergarten curriculum content in Shanghai, as defined by the Three-Year Action Plan, and is it universal for all public kindergartens in Shanghai? What values does it promote and how does it promote them? What type of curricula are used in private kindergartens and does the Shanghai Education Bureau supervise them? What ‘core Chinese values’ are included in private kindergarten curricula and how are they disseminated?
4. Parent involvement	- Parental values and goals included in the ECE programme - Parental involvement in kindergarten activities - Parent – teacher relations	How are the more affluent strata in Shanghai influencing ECE curriculum? How are parents reconstructing Confucian values? What ‘Western values’ are parents lobbying for, how and why? What is the importance of English to parents and why?
5. Teacher preparation	Professional development strategies	Province-specific requirements. Focus on requirements in Shanghai listed in the Three-Year Plan.
6. Preschool - primary school linkages	Shared responsibility between home, community, school, and ECE programme	Very little data- ignored in my analysis, but for a couple of questions in the parent questionnaire
Source: Cochran (2011), 67		

Table 2.2 Global ECE policy goals

Policy goals	Child-focused	Parent-driven	
1.	Prepare children for compulsory education.	5	Emancipate women and encourage them to enter the labour market.
2.	Socialise immigrant children and their parents.	6	Care for the children of employed parents.
3.	Provide children with health care and nutrition.		
4.	Reduce the effects of child poverty.		
Source: Cochran (1993)			

Table 2.3 ECE patterns according to adult and child pedagogic relationships

1.	The teacher-directed, programmed learning approach.
2.	The open framework approach: children are provided with free access to a range of instructive learning environments in which adults support their learning.
3.	The child-centred approach: the adults aim to provide a stimulating yet open-ended environment for children to play in.

Source: Sylva et al. (2010), 12

Table 2.4 Advantages and disadvantages of consultative and central curricula

	Framework, consultative	Central, competency-oriented
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holistic approach promoting a cohesive dissemination of social values to build human capital - Encourages societal participation in preschool activities - ECE professionals and parents retain a higher level of agency in interpreting national goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy and fast curricular reform, as local consultation is not needed - Lower classroom costs, as teacher-centred instruction allows higher staff ratios - Greater preschool-primary school curriculum continuity, as it is centrally overseen - Homogenous, well-researched national curriculum, ensuring the same standard of quality (minimal teacher input)
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More expensive, as curriculum is interpreted and developed locally - Requires a national setting with strong citizen participation in participatory democracy - Requires a high level of accountability and involvement on the part of the local actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers more likely to use didactic teaching patterns - Children encouraged to master specific competencies to the detriment of playtime - Child's individuality superseded by the need to reach nationally set 'natural development' goals - Expert-based system more likely to discourage parent input

Source: Bennett (2001), 219-256

Table 2.5 The 12 core socialist values

Level	Values
national level	prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony fuqiang(富强), minzhu (民主), wenming (文明), and hexie (和谐)
social level	freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law ziyou (自由), pingdeng (平等), gongzheng (公正), and fazhi (法治)
individual level	patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship aiguo (爱国), jingye (敬业), chengxin (诚信), and youshan (友善)

Source: Zhang and Yao (2013)

Table 2.6 The four stages of Chinese ECE pattern and curriculum development

	Period	Phase	Main ECE developments
Stage 1	1903-1949	Learning from Japan to total Americanisation and the Alive Education model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chinese ECE first shaped after the Japanese model, then by Americanization (especially John Dewey’s pattern), and finally by experimental schools developed by Chinese teachers like Chen Heqin (1892–1982) - Heqin develops the ‘Wholeness or Units Pedagogy’ method (new Chinese scientific ECE approach, child-centric), a pattern that fit Chinese conditions and characteristics and was widely used from the 1920s until the establishment of the PRC (see Huo 2015: 6-7; Wang 2004)
Stage 2	1949-1978	Learning from the Soviet Union: Direct instruction and collectivist education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China fully absorbs the soviet ECE model, based on subject instruction (emphasis on children’s overall development and systematic knowledge) - Critique and rejection of ‘child-centric’ patterns (Western and Units Pedagogy) - Ordinary kindergarten curricula built on direct instruction and subject instruction, with syllabi imitating the Soviet model and given by the central government - homogenous training of future teachers - Top-down approach to education, very successful in creating an orderly, uniform ECE platform in terms of instruction and administration.
Stage 3	1978-2009	Learning from Europe and America: Theme-based activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imitation of child-centred American and European patterns (e.g. Montessori, Piaget, Multiple Intelligences), without

		instruction and child-centred education	fully discarding the embedded instruction-based socialist pattern
Stage 4	2009-present	The Adjustment of ECE Reform under a National Innovation Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preschool education defined as a key component to children’s well-being and part of social welfare - National goals with core socialist values (a moral education foundation) to be interpreted and implemented at local levels by the end of 2020 -At least one year of universal preschool education by 2020 -Three-year action plans at local level
Source: Huo (2015)			

Table 2.7 Lists of major ECE laws, regulations, and guidelines relevant in China

Year	Law, regulation or guideline	Highlights and comments
1932	Kindergarten Curriculum Standards	First formal curriculum
1952	Kindergarten Provisional Guidelines’ (Trial draft)	Soviet Union influences
1981	Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial draft)	Guidelines on curriculum
1989	Kindergarten Work Regulations (Trial)	Legal basis for operating kindergarten services
1989	Regulations on the Management of Kindergartens	Principles of operations of Kindergartens
1991	The Law on Protection of Minors	Law
1996	Kindergarten Work Regulations	Replace the 1989 regulations
2001	Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial basis)	Influenced by Western theories and ideas
2003	Opinions from the Development (Units) including the Ministry of Education on Innovations and Development of Early Childhood Education	Cooperative document from various departments
2010	National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020) (Development Plan, Outline and Guidelines)	Set concrete goals for ECE development
2010	Several Opinions of the State Council on the Current Development of Preschool Education	ECE as a measure of peoples’ well-being
2011	Issues on Increasing Financial Investment and Support in Early Childhood Education Development	Increasing investment to central and western areas
2012	Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years (the 2012 Curriculum Guidelines)	Curriculum guidelines for kindergarten
2012	Issues regarding the Development of 0–3 Childcare Services Pilot Project	The government efforts in improving childcare services

2016	Kindergarten Work Regulations	Replace the 1996 regulations
2018	State Council Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Standardisation of Preschool Education	Standardisation of ECE as a ‘social public welfare’ undertaking
2018	Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers	Moral education for building a patriotic staff
2020	Law on the Rights of Minors	Law guaranteeing the rights of minors
Sources: Qi and Melhuish (2016); updates by the author until 2020		

Table 2.8 The 3rd stage of ECE policy guidelines

Date	Law, regulation, or guideline	Stipulations and comments
October 1981	Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial draft)	- Missions of education - 8 curriculum domains - Age characteristics of the children
June 1989	Kindergarten Work Regulations (Trial)	- 10 chapters - Provisions for a more ‘child-centric’ model - Recommended games as the main teaching method
August 1989	Regulations on the Management of Kindergartens	
March 1996	Kindergarten Work Regulations	-Continued the curriculum reform started in the 1980s.
September 2001	Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial)	- 4 parts: General Provisions (I), Education Content and Requirements (II), Organisation and Implementation (III), and Education Evaluation (IV); Part 1: mission and challenges of ECE; Part 2: goals and key guidance for what it structures as the five domains of comprehensive education (health, language, society, science, and art); Part 3: organisation and implementation of education content Part 4: methods and standards of education evaluation.
2003	Opinions from the Development (Units) including the Ministry of Education on innovations and development of early childhood education	- Instructive policy document expanding the 2001 Guidelines
Source: Huo (2015)		

Table 2.9 The 4th stage of ECE policy guidelines

Year	Law, regulation, or guideline	Stipulations and comments
2010a	National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020) (China State Council)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One-year universal preschool education for all children, two-year universal preschool for most children, and three-year services in developed areas - The implementation of specific and clear education provisions at all levels of government, covering development, planning, investment, teaching staff organisation, quality improvement, and fair access; -The emphasis on rural preschool development and the resources they have available.
2010b	Issues Regarding Current Development of Early Childhood Education (China State Council)	- 10 principles for developing ECE
2011	Issues on Increasing Financial Investment and Support in Early Childhood Education Development (Ministry of Finance)	- Increasing public investment in ECE
2014	On the Implementation of the Second Phase of Preschool Education Three-Year Action Plan (Ministry of Education, Q and A Session)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Second round of Three-Year Action Plans at provincial, regional and local levels; - Main tasks: (1) expanding kindergarten programmes; (2) adjusting programme structures and strengthening kindergarten management mechanisms; and (3) improving the quality of services.
2016	Kindergarten Work Regulations (Ministry of Education)	-The most important policy document regarding ECE as it was designed under the Education law and regulates all other policy documents and kindergarten practices
2018	State Council Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Standardisation of Preschool Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standardisation of ECE as ‘social public welfare’ - Quality and inclusive ECE by overcoming (1) difficult enrolment requirements and (2) high tuition fees - Inclusive private kindergartens
2018	Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers	- Moral education for building a patriotic staff
2020	Law on the Rights of Minors	- Inclusion of moral education advocacy in at every educational level

Sources: Qi and Melhuish (2016); updates by the author until 2020

Table 3.1 Characteristics of learning environments

1.	Different settings: kindergarten, home, neighbourhood
2.	Key individuals: parents, siblings, peers, extended family, teachers, medical personnel
3.	Materials present and their relevance to the child's linguistic and cultural background and physical needs: curriculum, weekly and monthly lesson plans, teaching boards displayed in the classroom, books, children's learning diaries
4.	Cultural expectations and languages spoken, and language patterns modelled
5.	Structure provided and consistency of routine: teaching pattern, daily schedule
6.	Home stressors: divorce, poverty, chronic illness
7.	The organization of the kindergarten environment and the demands of instruction, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning opportunities presented - Organisation of activities - Clarity of teacher directions - Adequacy of feedback in terms of reinforcement and the information provided - Consistency of routines - Language modelling and early literacy experiences - Amount and type of practice opportunities - Opportunities for socialisation

Source: Boehm and Weinberg (1997), 11-12

Table 3.2 Kindergarten selection criteria

1.	Official kindergarten ranking (SEB-based): grade one level one institutions for public kindergartens (must include at least one demonstrations kindergarten – e.g. Public1)
2.	Kindergarten popularity on social media
3.	Tuition fees (indicator of socioeconomic status)
4.	Enrolment requirements
5.	Ownership: public and private kindergartens required for a comprehensive analysis
6.	Language of instruction: Mandarin (local stream) / English-Mandarin (bilingual stream)
7.	Teaching pattern and curriculum: leading public kindergartens with cutting-edge programmes: at least one affiliated with a local university (Public3) and one with a bilingual/ international stream (Public1)
8.	Accessibility: have a contact who can introduce me to the principal and help me gain access to observing kindergarten activities, access the curriculum and lesson plans, interview teaching staff and collect parent questionnaires

Source: Criteria compiled by the author before the start of fieldwork

Table 3.3 Key observation points for China's National Day, the Spring Festival, Halloween, and Christmas

<p>China's National Day</p>	<p>Key Observation Points: the 24 core socialist values (a patriotic discourse)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child wears celebratory clothes (teachers ask the children to wear red clothes or military uniforms): Why did the child choose these particular clothes? Does s/he understand the symbolism behind them (e.g. the meaning of the colour red) - Traditional activities: making a flag, marching around the kindergarten, saluting the flag in the main outdoors area, singing the national anthem, speeches by local CCP representatives - Disseminated patriotic content: core socialist values, anthem, patriotic songs and poems - Related arts and crafts - Is the significance of the holiday explained and how do the children internalise it? - Who introduces the event? (Chinese/ foreign teacher) - Are there any media resources used to familiarise the children with the holiday? If yes, which ones and why? - How did the children prepare the event at home? What did the teachers require the parents to do at home and bring to kindergarten? (collect data via teacher interviews and parent questionnaires) <p>Note: As this festival was merged with the Mid-Autumn Festival in 2017, also assess the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture by looking at elements specific to this holiday</p>
<p>Spring Festival (Chinese New Year and the Lantern Festival)</p>	<p>Key Observation Points: traditional Chinese values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child wears traditional Chinese clothes: Why did the child choose these clothes? Does s/he understand the symbolism behind them (e.g. the meaning behind a dragon embroidery) - Traditional activities: calligraphy (writing the character 'fu'), traditional food (spring rolls), making a paper lantern, exchanging red envelopes, performing a lion/dragon dance - Disseminated cultural content: the story of the Chinese zodiac or using fireworks to scare the monster Nian; the importance of filial piety and family reunion - Related arts and crafts - Is the significance of the holiday explained and how do the children internalise it? - Who introduces the event? - Are there any media resources used to familiarize the children with the holiday? If yes, which ones and why? - How did the children prepare for the event at home? What did the teachers require the parents to do at home and bring to kindergarten? (ask the teachers and assess through parent questionnaire)
<p>Halloween</p>	<p>Key Observation Points: Western liberal culture (popular culture)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child wears a costume. Why did the child choose this particular costume? Insight into popular culture assimilation, as it is predicted

	<p>that Disney characters will be the norm, especially since the opening of Disneyland Shanghai in June 2016.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional activities: carving a Jack-o'-lantern, going trick-or-treating - Taught songs: American songs? - Related arts and crafts - Is the religious significance of the holiday explained? - Who coordinates the event? (Chinese/ foreign teacher(s)) - Are there any media resources used to familiarise the children with the holiday? If yes, which ones and why? - Are there any media used to familiarize the children with the holiday? If yes, which ones and why? (ask the teachers) - How did the children prepare for the day of the event at home? What did the teachers require the parents to do at home and bring to kindergarten? (ask the teachers)
Christmas	<p>Key Observation Points: Western liberal culture (popular culture)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do the children know about Christmas? Key words: Santa Claus, Christmas tree, gift, reindeer (assess their extended knowledge) - Traditional activities: decorating the Christmas tree, exchanging gifts, Santa bringing gifts to the classroom, writing a letter for Santa - Taught carols - Related arts and crafts - Is the religious significance of the holiday explained? - Who introduces the event, the Chinese teacher or, if the case, the foreign teacher? - Are there any media resources used to familiarise the children with the holiday? If yes, which ones and why? - How did the children prepare for the event at home? What did the teachers require the parents to do at home and bring to kindergarten? (ask the teachers and parent questionnaire)
<p>Source: List of observation points compiled by the author before the observation of each event</p>	

<p><i>Table 3.4 Overview of parent questionnaires</i></p>	
Public1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 rounds, open-end questions, Mandarin version - distributed by class teachers in two K2 classes, one class being the one observed during the academic year - Round 1: collected in November 2017, 28 respondents - Round 2: collected in March 2018, 42 respondents <p>Note: the questionnaires were distributed to a total of over 50 families each round (2 K2 classes, one being the observed class)</p>
Public2	N/A The gatekeeper did not allow their dissemination
Public3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 rounds, open-end questions, Mandarin version - distributed by class teachers in two K2 classes, one class being the one observed during the academic year - Round 1: collected in November 2017, 37 respondents

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Round 2: collected in March 2018, 39 respondents <p>Note: the questionnaires were distributed to a total of over 50 families each round (2 K2 classes, one being the observed class)</p>
Private1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 round, 16 multiple choice and open-end questions, bilingual (English-Mandarin) version - distributed by class teachers in two K2 classes, one class being the one observed during the academic year - collected in March 2018, 32 respondents <p>Note: the questionnaires were distributed to a total of 60 families</p>
Private2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 round, 13 multiple choice questions, Mandarin version - collected in March 2018, 10 respondents <p>Note: I was allowed to give out and collect only 10 questionnaires</p>
Total	188 questionnaires

Table 3.5 Core questions for semi-structured interviews with education officials, ECE academics, and kindergarten principals

1.	What do you know about the 2010 Education Reform and the 2020 national goals for ECE?
2.	What can you tell me about the current STYAP (and the way it affects your kindergarten)?
3.	What is the current situation of public and private kindergartens in Shanghai?
4.	Were you influenced by the 19 th National Congress in any way? Have you noticed a recent demand from the Centre (Beijing) to increase the dissemination of moral education and limit that of Western culture?
5.	What can you tell me about the 12 core socialist values in local legislation/ your curriculum?
6.	How is moral education being disseminated in public kindergartens? How about in private ones? For principals: Are you teaching the 12 core social values in your curriculum? How about moral education-related content?
7.	Is there an official ECE curriculum in Shanghai and does it promote any moral education content, like the 12 core socialist values?
8.	What, if any, Western values are promoted in the official ECE pattern and curriculum?
9.	How is China's National Day celebrated in kindergartens? How about the Spring Festival?
10.	How are Christmas and Halloween celebrated?
11.	What role do parents play in kindergarten life? Do they have a say in curriculum development and activities?
12.	Where does the funding for public kindergartens come from? Does it differ from district to district? Do differently ranked kindergartens ask for higher fees?
13.	Where does the funding for private kindergartens come from? Does it differ from district to district? Do differently ranked kindergartens ask for higher fees?

Source: List of core questions compiled by the author

Table 3.6 Core questions for direct observation

Event	Main research questions
China’s National Day	What socialist values are disseminated during this celebration, how are they disseminated? What is the response of teachers, parents and children?
Spring Festival	What traditional Chinese values are disseminated, how are they disseminated? What is the response of teachers, parents and children?
Halloween	How is Halloween celebrated in a preschool setting? What international popular culture elements can be identified? What is the response of teachers, parents and children?
Christmas	How is Christmas celebrated in a preschool setting? What international popular culture elements can be identified? What is the response of teachers, parents and children?

Source: List of core questions compiled by the author

Table 3.7 Participant observation procedural guidelines

1.	Who will make the observation?
2.	Who and what will be observed?
3.	Where will the observation take place?
4.	When will the observation occur?
5.	How will the observation be recorded?

Source: Cartwright and Cartwright (1984), 31

Table 3.8 Sample of values behaviour checklist

Patriotic behaviour	Can sing anthem/ patriotic songs	Wears red/ traditional clothing	Can recite patriotic poetry	Can draw flag	Can say what the national day is about
Traditional Chinese culture	Can write the character for luck (calligraphy)	Knows customs associated with the Spring Festival	Knows the Chinese zodiac	Knows Chinese myths/ stories	Wears traditional clothes
Western culture	Knows main holidays; e.g. Christmas, Halloween, Easter	Can speak English/ takes English classes	Celebrated Halloween/ Christmas at home	Is familiar with related stories/ customs e.g.: going trick-or-treating, decorating a Christmas tree	Is familiar with western popular culture e.g. Disney characters

Source: Checklist template compiled by the author

Table 3.9 Sample of worksheet for assessing children's behaviour of interest

Behaviour of interest: patriotic behaviour related to the celebration of the Spring Festival							
Child	Is wearing traditional clothing	Can talk about the significance of the Chinese New Year (e.g. family dinner, spring couplets, red envelopes)	Can use calligraphy (e.g. to write the Chinese character for 'luck')	Took part in a lion/dragon dance	Can recite spring couplets	Total A	Comment
Total B						Grand total	
<p>Total A is total of all the observed behaviours demonstrated by a particular child. Total B is total for each unit of behaviour observed for all of the children combined. Grand total is total of all observed behaviours.</p>							
<p>Source: Boehm and Weinberg (1997), 103</p>							

Table 3.10 Sample of event activity plan

Time	Activity	Place	Purpose
Morning	Snack	Snack area	Ensure children meet their nutritional needs
	Circle time	Classroom	Group discussion of event and planned activities
	Activity 1	Classroom/ yard/ Concert hall/etc.	In line with event targets, as defined by the kindergarten/ teachers
	Activity 2	Classroom/ yard/ Concert hall/etc.	In line with event targets, as defined by the kindergarten/ teachers
	Activity 3	Classroom/ yard/ Concert hall/etc.	In line with event targets, as defined by the kindergarten/ teachers
Noon	Lunch	Classroom/ eating area	Ensure children meet their nutritional needs
	Afternoon nap	Classroom/ sleeping area	

Afternoon	Afternoon snack	Snack area	Ensure children meet their nutritional needs
	Circle time	Classroom	Group discussion of event
	Activity 4	Classroom	Free play/ arts and crafts

Source: Daily activity plan compiled by the author based on observation of kindergarten events and the daily schedule proposed by the Shanghai Education Bureau

Table 3.11 Themes covered in the parent questionnaire

1.	Family makeup and structure
2.	Members of the household who influence the child and the nature of these interactions
3.	Key out-of-school influences on the child: grandparents, babysitter, peers, neighbours
4.	Pervasive images the child is likely to perceive on a regular basis at home/ in the neighbourhood
5.	Parental expectations for kindergarten Parental involvement in kindergarten life Home interactions/ experiences that support learning and the child's concept of self
6.	Parental cultural values and expectations
7.	Parental expectations of the child at home and at kindergarten
8.	Socioeconomic dimension
Note	Core questionnaire distributed in Public1, Public3, and Private1 kindergartens

Source: Adapted from Boehm and Weinberg (1997), 13

Table 3.12 Merged parent questionnaire, English version

1. Family makeup and structure:
 1. How many children do you have and how old are they?
2. Members of the household who influence the child and the nature of the interactions:
 2. Who looks after your child during the week?
 3. How about at the weekend?
 4. How much time do you spend with your child during the week?
 5. What activities do you do with your child at the weekend?
3. Key out-of-school influences on the child:
 6. What people most influence your child out-of-kindergarten? (parents, grandparents, *ayi*)
4. Pervasive images the child is likely to perceive on a regular basis at home:
 7. What are the most important things/ values you teach your child?
 8. How do you teach him/ her these things?
5. Parental expectations for kindergarten
 9. Why did you enrol your child at a private/ public kindergarten? What do you think they will learn there?
 10. What do you want your child to be learning in kindergarten?
 11. What socialist values is your child learning in kindergarten?
6. Parental involvement in kindergarten life:

12. Do you get involved in your child's kindergarten life? For example, do you:
 - take part in parent - teacher meetings? If yes, how often every semester?
 - communicate with the classroom teacher(s) via WeChat, kindergarten platform, school diary? If yes, how often every week?
 - take part in kindergarten events like day trips, parent lessons? If yes, how often every semester?
 - have a say in what is taught in kindergarten (influence the curriculum)? If yes, how did you contribute?
 - Are you on the kindergarten board?
13. Do you feel you have a say in what your child is learning in kindergarten? If yes, in what way?
14. Do you help your child at home with his/ her kindergarten assignments?
15. For bilingual kindergartens: If you can speak English, do you help your child with his/ her English assignments?
16. What are your future plans regarding your child's primary school? Private/ public primary school? Why?
17. Would you like your child to eventually study abroad? If yes, do you have a particular country in mind? Why?
7. Parental cultural values and expectations:
 18. What does 'Chinese identity' mean to you?
 19. Have you heard about the 12 core socialist values? What are they and what do they mean to you?
 20. Did you celebrate China's National Day with your child? If yes, how?
 21. What did you teach your child about China's National Day?
 22. Do you think it is important for your child to learn any foreign languages? If yes, which one(s) and why?
 23. Is your child learning any foreign languages? If yes, which ones and where?
 - at kindergarten
 - at home (teacher is a private tutor or a parent)
 - at a language centre (which one?)
 24. For bilingual kindergartens: Does your child have a private English tutor or take any extra English classes? If yes, please give details.
 26. Is your child taking any extra classes? If yes, which ones and why? (eg. Chinese calligraphy)
 27. Did you celebrate Halloween with your child this year? If yes, how?
 28. What is your child's favourite cartoon? Why?
 29. What is your child's favourite storybooks? Why?
 30. Did you celebrate Christmas at home in 2017? If yes, what did you teach your child about Christmas? Please give details.
 31. How did you celebrate the Spring Festival this year?
 32. What did you teach your child about the Spring Festival?
 33. What does 'Chinese culture' mean to you?
 34. Do you think it is important for your child to learn about traditional Chinese culture? Why?
8. Socioeconomic dimension
 35. Where were you born? If not Shanghai, when did you move to Shanghai?
 36. What is your highest educational degree?
 - High-school diploma
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree

- Phd
- 37. Do you and your partner speak English?
- beginner
- intermediate
- advanced
- proficient
- 38. What is your occupation?
- 39. How much money do you spend on your child's education every month?
- 40. How often do you travel abroad?
- 41. Have you travelled abroad with your child? If yes, where?

Note: The parent questionnaires were distributed in Mandarin, with the exception of Private1 kindergarten, where I used a bilingual format

Source: Questionnaire designed by the author

Table 3.13 Data collection procedure for kindergarten observation and parent questionnaires

Steps	
1.	Rely on a local contact (guanxi) to be introduced to the kindergarten principal in person. Send an email introducing my background and research interest prior to the meeting (Information sheet – see Table 3.14).
2.	Meet with the kindergarten principal (and the K2 age-group leader) to discuss my research goals and ask for permission to conduct observation. Show them the two parent questionnaires and ask for approval. Ask them to take part in a semi-structured interview.
3.	If the principal gives her consent, the K2 group leader can explain my research to the other K2 teachers and ask them to use my one-page, child-friendly brochure to explain my research to both parents and children.
4.	The classroom with the most positive parent response is selected, after the parents and children have given their verbal consent to take part in this study.
5.	A half/full day is observed for every event, with the researcher aiming to be as inconspicuous as possible to not influence the subjects' behaviour.
6.	Parents are asked to fill out one/two anonymous questionnaires, the first in November 2017 and the second in March 2018.
7.	Classroom teachers are interviewed before and after each participant observation. Semi-structured interviews are carried out one time. They are conducted by the researcher alone or with the help of a research assistant, usually in Mandarin, and are audio recorded. Informed consent is asked prior to every interview.
8.	Kindergarten directors are interviewed with the help of an interpreter, with core questions having been emailed in advance. They are interviewed once.

Source: Procedural steps designed and followed by the author during fieldwork

Table 3.14 Information sheet for kindergarten gatekeeper, English version

Researcher's Name:
King's College London, Lau China Institute
PhD candidate in Chinese Studies

Email:
Tel.:
WeChat:

To [gatekeeper name, kindergarten]:

My name is ...and I am a Phd student at King's College London, UK. I would like to ask for your help with my research project in Shanghai. I am interested in early childhood education in China and I plan on spending the 2017-2018 academic year gathering data on public and private kindergartens in Shanghai. My aim is to understand the influence the interplay between globalisation and localisation has on early childhood education, for example by looking at what kindergarten curricula are being currently used and what parents think about them. I am especially interested in the way your kindergarten celebrates certain holidays throughout the schoolyear.

Hence, I would ask for your permission to come to your kindergarten and observe a senior (K2) class 5 to 10 days during the academic year, on days when the children are celebrating popular holidays like the Spring Festival or Halloween. As a previous kindergarten teacher in Shanghai, I am used to working with children, while as a King's College London researcher I am aware of and will respect all ethical concerns for dealing with young children. I promise you I will not interact with the pupils in any way without your consent, nor will I photograph them during my observation without permission. I am only interested in taking notes of their normal behaviour throughout a full day in kindergarten. I also plan on giving out parent questionnaires and, when possible, talking with volunteer parents on their educational desires for their children. Of course, all parents must give their separate consent for each observation, and I will ensure the anonymity of all participants, as well as the name of your kindergarten.

I would appreciate it if you would agree to meet with me this month and give me the opportunity to tell you more about my research in person. I believe my research will be mutually beneficial, as I would like to provide the participating K2 class with a couple of English story-time classes, where the children and I could have lots of fun learning English. I designed these lessons for six-year-old Chinese children to learn more about Western stories by playacting and doing related arts and crafts. If you accept to take part in my research, I will submit you the lesson plans and we could decide on a schedule for my lessons.

If you have any questions about my research or myself, please don't hesitate to contact me either by phone or email, or get in touch with my supervisors, ..., from King's College London.

I deeply appreciate you taking the time to read my email and I look forward to your reply.

Yours,

First supervisor:

Second supervisor:

Table 3.15 Summary checklist for making reliable observations

Issue	Considerations
1. Objectivity	Specific behaviours listed beforehand
	Eliminating bias due to personal belief or expectation
	Awareness of developmental expectations across the cultural/ language group served
	Not knowing the hypotheses
2. Clear, usable recording format	Nonoverlapping categories
	Avoiding complex coding system
3. Inter-observer agreement	Aiming for 80% or better
	Adequate training
4. Avoiding observer drift	Systematic spot-checks
	Two observers present 10-20% of the time

Source: Boehm and Weinberg (1997), 87

Table 3.16 Coding for interviewees

No.	Category	Shanghai, Date	Anonymised name	Job title	Code
1.	Education officials	11/2017	Education official Huang	Education official for the Shanghai Education Bureau	E01
2.		12/2017	Education official Bai	Education official for the Minhang Education Bureau	EO2
3.		01/2018	Education official Hei	Education official for the Minhang Education Bureau	EO3
4.	Education experts	N/A	Eaten	Education student Eaten, mother working for the Minhang Education Bureau	ES4
5.		04/2018	Media expert Carol	Media person working for the Shanghai Media Group	ME5
6.		06/2018	Prof. Liu	ECE Professor at a famous university in Shanghai	EE6
7.		04/2018	Prof. Zhang	ECE Professor at a famous university in Shanghai	EE7

8.	Public1 kindergarten	10/2017	Principal Deng	Public1 kindergarten principal	PU1K8
9.		03/2018	Teacher Yun	International stream coordinator and kindergarten spokesperson	PU1K9
10.		05/2018	Teacher Wu	Senior class Chinese teacher	PU1K10
11.		05/2018	Teacher Shan	Senior class Chinese teacher	PU1K11
12.	Public2 kindergarten	11/01/2018	Principal Ling	Public2 principal	PU2K12
13.		03/2018	Vice-principal Hua	Public2 vice-principal	PU2K13
14.		11/2017	Teacher Xiao	Senior class Chinese teacher	PU2K14
15.		02/2018	Teacher Mei	Senior class Chinese teacher	PU2K15
16.	Public3 kindergarten	11/2017	Principal Lin	Public3 principal	PU3K16
17.		01/2018 02/2018 03/2018	Teacher Wen	Senior class Chinese teacher	PU3K17
18.		01/2018 02/2018 03/2018	Teacher LinLin	Senior class Chinese teacher	PU3K18
19.		10/2017	Principal Stella	Private1 principal	PR1K19
20.	Private1 Kindergarten	10/2017 04/2018	Teacher Anna	Senior class Chinese teacher K2 age group coordinator	PR1K20
21.		11/2018 04/2018	Teacher Nora	Senior class Chinese teacher	PR1K21
22.		11/2018 04/2018	Teacher Vicky	Senior class Western teacher	PR1K22
23.	Private2 Kindergarten	11/2017	Principal Rosie	Private2 principal	PR2K23
24.		12/2017	Teacher Ella	International stream coordinator and spokesperson, senior class teachers	PR2K24
25.		12/2017	Teacher George	Senior class Western teacher	PR2K25

Table 4.1: State Council Opinions 2010: 10 Issues on ECE development

1.	Put the development of preschool education in a more important position
2.	Expand the resources of preschool education in various forms
3.	Devise a variety of ways to increase the educational level of kindergarten teachers
4.	Create multiple channels for pre-university education investment
5.	Strengthen kindergarten management
6.	Improve kindergarten safety and security
7.	Standardise the management of kindergarten fees
8.	Adhere to science education and promote the healthy development of children's physical and mental health
9.	Improve the working mechanism and strengthen organizational leadership
10.	Overall planning and implementation of the Three-Year Action Plan for preschool education

Source: State Council Opinions (2010)

Table 4.2 2006-2008 STYAP: Six specific objectives

1.	Three years of preschool education for more than 98% of the school-aged children with a Shanghai household registration or holding a Shanghai residence permit
2.	The construction of various kindergartens in the city is basically up to standard. More than 80% of the kindergartens reached the “City Kindergarten Building Area Quota (Trial)” (Teaching the Basics [1988] No. 108)
3.	Kindergarten education personnel need to be certified to work. More than 85% of the full-time teachers have obtained a college education or above, and 20% of them have obtained a bachelor’s degree or above.
4.	The number of students in each class of the kindergarten is controlled within the standards set by the state (25 pre-K, 30 K1, 35 K2). Encourage small-scale education in central urban areas.
5.	The formation of a flexible and diverse preschool education service network. More than 80% of the kindergartens have a generally improved level of schooling, high quality of school amenities, satisfied parents, and a good reputation in the community.
6.	Young children are healthy and lively, and their basic qualities like curiosity, bravery, self-confidence, and responsibility are nurtured.

Source: Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (2006-2008)

Table 4.3 2011-2013 STYAP: Four overall goals

1.	Further strengthen government involvement in building and improving public kindergartens, in order for the preschool public service system to be compatible with Shanghai's economic and social development
2.	Further promote the development of preschool education and reach full (100%) enrolment of children aged 3-6 (only for the permanent population)
3.	Further strengthen the management of preschool education, ensure safety regulations, as well as the health and happiness of kindergarten children
4.	Continue to build more kindergartens, promote the development of preschool education, and improve the quality of preschool education

Source: Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (2011-2013)

Table 4.4 Shanghai-born population in 2005-2013

Unit: 10,000 people	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Permanent residents	12.39	13.42	16.66	16.66	16.46	17.51	16.16	16.6	16.5
Of which: the registered population of this city	8.25	8.12	10.08	9.67	9.23	10.02	9.38	9.59	9.2
Proportion of resident population (%)	66.59	60.35	60.48	58.04	56.1	57.22	58.04	57.77	55.76
Foreign resident population	4.18	5.32	6.58	6.99	7.2	7.49	6.78	7.01	7.3
Proportion of resident population (%)	33.41	39.65	39.52	41.96	43.9	42.78	41.96	42.23	44.24

Source: Shanghai Municipal Family Planning Commission in STYAP (2011-2013), Chapter 2, Section 1 "The city faces a round of peak birth rates"

Table 4.5 Understanding the 2019-2021 STYAP in one picture



One Picture to Understand Shanghai’s Three-Year Action Plan for Pre-school Education (2019-2021)

Development Goals: (1) universal inclusiveness; (2) safety and quality; (3) diversity and tolerance

Kindergarten construction:

Have one kindergarten with 15 classes per 10,000 people
Build, renovate and expand 90 kindergartens.

Benefits to children:

The gross enrolment rate in three years of kindergarten education to reach 99%,
The coverage rate of public kindergartens to reach 65%,
The proportion of children in public kindergartens to reach 70%,
The coverage rate of universal pre-school education to reach 85%

Quality improvement:

The proportion of public demonstrative kindergartens to reach 10%
The proportion of public level one kindergartens to reach 50%,

Team building:

The number of kindergarten staff will rise by 3,000 people each year, so that pre-school professional enrolment will increase by 10% every year

The proportion of full-time kindergarten teachers who have a bachelor's degree or above will increase to 80%

Each public kindergarten will strive to have one senior teacher, and the proportion of middle and senior teachers will reach 28%

For every 10 kindergartens there will be one professional ECE development centre with the purpose of generating outstanding teachers and principals.

Education guidance for parents

More than six public welfare free scientific parenting guidance events will be organised every year

Child guidance services will be provided for parents

Main measures:

1. Strengthen government responsibilities and improve the service system :
 - Strengthen government responsibilities and organisational leadership
 - Increase political support for the development of pre-university teaching
 - Develop a three-year action plan for regional preschool children

2. Integrate various resources and inclusive expansion of public welfare:
 - Strengthen the planning and construction of preschool education and kindergarten resources
 - Vigorously develop inclusive kindergartens
 - Improve the equipment configuration level of kindergartens
 - Pay increased attention to the safety of kindergartens
 - Promote the integration of nurseries and childcare.

3. Strengthen dynamic supervision and improve the quality of care and education
 - Strengthen the practice guidance for preschool education
 - Improve ECE quality evaluation and monitoring
 - Deepen a two-way connection/ linkage between kindergarten and primary school
 - Improve the participation of families and communities in preschool education,
 - Expand preschool education exchanges and cooperation.

4. Improve institutional mechanisms and improve team literacy
 - Pay attention to the development of teachers' ethics and style
 - Optimise teachers' training
 - Improve ECE research and training
 - Improve the comprehensive literacy of kindergarten principals
 - Strengthen the training of preschool education, teaching and research, and scientific research personnel.
 - Improve the professional ability and treatment of childcare staff

5. Strengthen practical application and improve technical efficiency
 - Improve the ECE information management system

- Promote the application of new technologies in the quality monitoring of preschool education
- Strengthen the effective application of information technology in preschool education

Guarantee mechanism:

- Optimise investment
- Improve governance
- Promote legislation
- Strengthen supervision
- Vigorous promotion

Source: Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (2019-2021)

Table 4.6 2018 Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers

1.	Strengthen the political direction set by Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era
2.	Be consciously patriotism and law-abiding by being loyal to the motherland, the people, and abiding by the principles of the Constitution
3.	Disseminate outstanding culture by taking the lead in practicing the core socialist values, carry forward truth, goodness, and beauty, and transmitting positive energy. It is not allowed to publish or forward wrong views or fabricate and disseminate false and bad information through education activities, forums, lectures, information networks and other channels.
4.	Concentrate on training and raising children by cultivating people with morality
5.	Strengthen security precautions
6.	Care for young children by ensuring their health and happy growth
7.	Follow the law of preschool education by promoting fun and games and not teaching the content of primary school in advance (against primary school subject teaching)
8.	Adhere to fairness and integrity
9.	Adhere to integrity and self-discipline.
10.	Standardise the behaviour of education protection.
Note	Only those guidelines of interest to the research topic are addressed in more detail

Source: Ten Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers in the New Era (Teacher [2018] No. 16)

Table 4.7 2019 Kindergarten activities calendar

January	Spring Festival reunion.
February	Convene a meeting of Party members to exchange and revise the work plan of the Party branch this year. Feedback summary of the results of the previous year's evaluation activities.
March	Party members learn from Lei Feng (雷锋) activities. Organize activities to celebrate March 8th International Women's Day.

April	Carry out the “Teacher Ethics Construction Month” (师德建设) activity Organize the activity of "inheriting the revolutionary tradition and paying tribute to the tombs of revolutionary martyrs"
May	“One Party member, one flag” party class activity
June	Celebrating the activities of June 1st International Children's Day
July	Carry out activities on Party Day and Army Day
August	Publicity activities of patriotism and advanced culture education.
September	Organize activities to celebrate Teachers’ Day
October	“One Party member, one flag” (一个党员一面旗帜) Party class activity National Day Theme Activities
November	“Be a person, be a teacher, be a learner” (为人、为师、为学) – teachers’ moral story evaluation activity
December	Evaluation activities Summary of the work of the Party branch.
Note	Not all activities are listed in this table, only those relevant for the research question.
Source: Kindergarten Party Branch Plan Activities Calendar (2018)	

Table 5.1 Questions targeting the celebration of China’s National Day and patriotism

1.	How did your child celebrate this year’s National Day at kindergarten?
2.	How did you and your child celebrate the National Day at home?
3.	What did you teach your child about China’s National Day? (Please give examples)
4.	What does ‘Chinese identity’ mean to you?
5.	What does ‘Chinese culture’ mean to you?
Notes	(1) The questionnaires were distributed in Public1 and Public3 kindergartens, with 28 and 37 answers being collected, respectively. (2) Two K2 classes filled out the questionnaires in each kindergarten, one being the K2 class chosen for observation throughout the academic year 2017-2018 (3): The question number in this table is the number on the October 2017 parent questionnaire.

*Table 5.2 Public1 Kindergarten’s lesson plan for the Spring Festival week
Senior class (K2) Chinese stream, February-March 2018*

Topics & Activities	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
morning	Chinese drumming	The Year of the Dog	Celebrations around the world	Celebrating the Lantern Festival (Folk games)	Traditional music and art performance (teachers)
afternoon	The 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac	The Spring Festival atmosphere	My interesting Spring Festival (the children talk about how they spent the	My friends and family (the importance of family reunion)	Hello, it’s nice to meet you (the importance of friendship)

			Chinese New Year)	
Source: Public1 Kindergarten lesson plan, senior class (K2) Chinese stream, February-March 2018				

*Table 5.3 Public1 Kindergarten's Lantern Festival event activities
2nd March 2018*

Event Hall: props to play with: dragon head and tail, Chinese doll head, sedan chair on bamboo poles to carry a child around, roll-a-hoop
Classroom1: Classic Chinese cartoons
Classroom2: Paper-cutting
Classroom3: Lantern Riddles
Classroom4: Arts and crafts- puppy cards
Classroom5: Calligraphy- writing 中/福 (*zhong/fu*) on red rice paper
Classroom6: Arts and crafts- easy paper lanterns
Classroom7: Circle throwing to catch stuffed puppies
Classroom8: Dress up in traditional clothes
Classroom9: Origami- dog head on a card with cupcake paper holders as flowers
Main entrance (outdoors): play the drums
Main lobby: Artisan stalls and folk performances. E.g.: old ladies in traditional costumes and opera makeup walking around on stilts, artisans making traditional clay figurines and traditional spun sugar animals

Notes:

Each child had a Lantern Festival “passport” with the name and location of each activity and gets a stamp after their completion
The children were completely absorbed by the event and kept running up and down the hallways collecting stamps (Life-skills teachers were present on every corridor and staircase to ensure their safety); the teachers stayed in their respective classrooms to coordinate their activity

Photos taken on the day of observation





Table 5.4 Public1 Kindergarten observation notes on the Lantern Festival celebration Chinese stream senior class, 2nd March 2018

The morning of the Lantern Festival I was greeted by Teacher Wu and taken to the main yard to watch a live performance of the lion dance, together with all the K2 children, from both the local and international streams. Everyone was wearing traditional clothes, and even I was given a red vest to join in the celebration. The activity was full of energy and flare, as the kindergarten had hired a professional troupe of drummers and dancers. The two lions, one red and one yellow, faced each other on the rhythm of the drums, making the children laugh in excitement or hide behind their teachers and classmates as the lions pretended to want to eat them.

The entire morning the kindergarten buzzed with excited energy. The class I was observing yet again, K2-1, had all its 32 children present, and everyone was wearing traditional attire. Upon returning to their classroom after the lion dance, they received a 'Folk Activity Passport' and listened to Teacher Shan go over the main activity. They had one hour to explore the over 20 traditional activities their teachers had prepared, which were scattered throughout the kindergarten. The children were asked to form small groups and take their passports with them, as they would receive a stamp for each completed activity.

I proceeded to randomly observe groups of children from classroom to classroom, as they freely explored the wide range of activities without the supervision of their homeroom teachers, who had their own classroom event to coordinate. The list of activities is detailed in Table 5.3 and is proof of the great length and expense Public1 went in order to organise this event, especially by inviting artisans to show the children authentic Chinese folk crafts like making clay or spun sugar figurines.

Table 5.5 Vignette from Public1 Kindergarten on the Lantern Festival celebration Chinese stream senior class, 2nd March 2018

Teacher Shan: What are we celebrating today?

Boy1: The first moon (of the New Year).

Girl1: The Lantern Festival.

Teacher Shan: The last day of the New Year Festival. We went to many classrooms today. Which was your favourite game?

Boy2: Catching the dogs by throwing circles.

Girl2: I liked the paper-cutting activity.

Teacher Shan: Yes, paper cutting is one of the oldest Chinese crafts that anyone can do. I will show you a traditional Chinese handicraft called paper cutting. [She explains how paper-cutting artists cut paper figurines, without using a pen to draw an outline, using the scissors as their pens. She cuts out a dog and explains the process step by step.] First, I cut the ears, the head, the body, the feet and the tail. Lastly, I cut the nose, mouth, and eyes. [The children watch with abated breath.]

Boy3: It looks just like a running dog!

Teacher Shan: After lunch I will cut a dog for everyone.

Class (at the same time): I want a red, green, etc. one! [each child says what colour they want, talking over one another]

Teacher Shan: I will teach you how to cut one by yourselves. The way I am doing it is a bit difficult, so we will draw the dog first.

Notes: (1) As my main interest was to understand how familiar the children were with this festival and its customs, I initially believed that the half-hour formal lesson coordinated by Teacher Shan (PU1K11) would have provided me with the perfect opportunity. However, as Teacher Shan was in her late 60s, her teaching style proved to be conservative and teacher driven. Accordingly, in contrast with Teacher Wu's (PU1K10) Christmas activity, Teacher Shan did not give the children the opportunity to express their ideas, guiding the lesson throughout.

(2) The rest of the lesson encompassed the usual Circle Time routine, where selected children talked about the weather that day and seasonal characteristics. Boy3 was supposed to prepare the story of the Lantern Festival but he couldn't remember it, so Teacher Shan helped him by telling the story herself. She also repeated the story behind making tangyuan, which the class had heard the previous day, while making the traditional treats with their teachers.

(3) The lesson exemplifies how the observed K2 children were not very familiar with the meaning behind this festival, as for them the event was an opportunity to play, and not to make a deeper connection with China's traditional culture.

*Table 5.6 Vignette from Public2 Kindergarten on a Spring Festival-related lesson
Senior class, 28th February 2018*

Teacher Mei: What do you remember about Chinese New Year customs from the video we've just watched together?

Boy1: When they celebrate the New Year, old people will be at home, and young people will go to their home.

Teacher Mei: Right. Old people will be at home, and young people will visit them and they will take a family photo together. Because the New Year should be celebrated together, in a family reunion. Is there anything else?

Boy2: I have also seen red paper on doors.

Teacher Mei: What's put on doors? Can anyone help him?

Class (together): Spring Festival couplets!

Teacher Mei: Yes. Every family has to put these couplets on their door for good luck. Has your family done this? This is also one of the customs to celebrate the New Year. Is there anything else?

Girl1: In remote areas, they do not have refrigerators. So how do they conserve their food? They put the food under the snow.

Boy3: So how can they find the food later?

Teacher Mei: They must have made some marks in the snow or they cannot find it in the snow. Maybe there is a tent beside it.

Boy3: Maybe they drawn a map.

Boy4: I also saw some chopsticks made of branches.

Teacher Mei: Really? I haven't noticed. I will have a look at the video again later.

Girl2: I also used branches as chopsticks while I was camping. It was very fun.

Teacher Mei: As we have seen, people celebrate the Spring Festival by cooking special food, reuniting with the family, putting couplets on their doors, and by lighting firecracker. So now I want to ask everyone: what did you do to celebrate this Spring Festival?

Boy5: I lit firecrackers.

Girl2: In most families, parents will give red envelopes to children. I am different. I gave red envelopes to the adults.

Teacher Mei: Why did you give them a red envelope?

Girl3: Because they always take care of us. They are tired and deserve to be thanked properly.

Teacher Mei: Very good! See, class, she is filial towards her parents. She not only got a red envelope from her parents, she also gave them one in return. You should all learn from her.

Photos taken on the day of observation



*Table 5.7 Vignette from Public3 Kindergarten on a Lantern Festival riddles activity
Senior class, 27th February 2018*

Teacher LinLin: What did you do at home for the Spring Festival? What do Chinese people do to celebrate the New Year?

Girl1: Visit other people's homes. When my mother and I go on a visit, we will have to go very far. Sometimes we have to go up a mountain. We will stay there for a while, have lunch, and play.

Teacher LinLin: Anyone else?

Boy2: We made jiaozi at home.

Teacher LinLin: Why does one eat jiaozi?

Girl3: Because they are part of Chinese culture.

Teacher LinLin: Yes, this is a traditional Chinese dish. In the night before the New Year, especially around midnight, families will come together and eat jiaozi. It means the cross point 交子 of the two years. And my family will also make a special jiaozi.

Class: It's the Jiaozi with money inside.

Teacher LinLin: Whoever eats this dumpling will...?

Class: Have a good fortune.

Teacher LinLin: Right! They will be lucky for the whole year.

Class: Money can't be eaten, can it?

Teacher LinLin: No. In the old days, people used to put money in a special dumpling. Nowadays, in my family, we will make a pistachios dumpling. We made a small change, but it is still an ancient custom.

Girl4: My mother broke something.

Teacher LinLin: This is a taboo during the Spring Festival. If we still break something, we will say 岁岁平安 (碎碎平安) or 花开富贵. (They share the same pronunciation. Or describing broken things as a blooming flower). But we still do not break things during Spring Festival. Does anyone else who want to talk about the Spring Festival?

Boy5: I visited my grandma. I ate crab there. We have found a small park in the neighbourhood and I played there.

Teacher LinLin: Good, we also have another custom. During the Spring Festival, we will all go back to our hometown. We have to go back to our hometown to be with our family. On the Spring Festival one must go back to his/her old home to reunite with their family. Also, what must one wear?

Class: New and beautiful clothes.

Teacher LinLin: So what will your parents and other older relatives give you or put under your pillow?

Class: Red envelopes.

Teacher LinLin: Have you received any?

Class: Yes!

Teacher LinLin: So, during the Spring Festival, we will all wear new clothes and get red envelopes with money under our pillow.

Photos taken on the day of observation



Table 6.1 Halloween-related questions in Public1 and Public3 Kindergartens

1.	How did your child celebrate Halloween this year in kindergarten? Please give some examples.
2.	How did you help your child prepare for Halloween at home?
3.	What did you teach your child about Halloween?
Notes	Public1 – 28 respondents; Public3 – 37 respondents The questionnaire was distributed in Mandarin

Source: November 2017 parent questionnaire

*Table 6.2 Public1 Kindergarten observation of Halloween activity
Chinese stream, 31st October 2017*

On the morning of 31st October 2017 I arrived at Public1 accompanied by my Chinese friend, ready to visit the kindergarten for the first time and meet its principal and vice-principal. We were greeted by a crowd of children and teachers, all dressed-up and wishing each other “Happy Halloween” in English. Halloween songs in English were being played through loudspeakers all around, and all the buildings and inner yards were adorned with thematic decorations.

After a short chat with a very busy principal, Teacher Yun, the vice-principal, showed us around the kindergarten and told us about their history and many awards. The most decorated part of the kindergarten was the second floor, which hosts the international classes. Both corridors and classrooms abounded with spider webs and plastic spiders, floating ghosts, skull lights, scary lanterns, witches on broomsticks and glowing Jack-o'-lanterns. In contrast, the Chinese stream classrooms only had a few Halloween decorations (a couple of plastic spiders and Jack-o'-lanterns), as their decor mainly had traditional Chinese elements. In the classroom I was invited to observe throughout the academic year, K2-1, the walls were covered in red Chinese latticework, a large map of China on the Teaching Board, and blue and white Chinese vases as children's art on the Art Display Board.

Teacher Yun told us that the initial plan had been for the children to go from classroom to classroom and engage in a different Halloween activity in each one, as well as take part in a kindergarten-wide Halloween parade in the main yard. However, because of a contagious disease situation, all these shared activities had to be cancelled, and each class had to hold their individual party. The children ended up playing in the Halloween-decorated lobby a classroom at a time, as well as going trick-or-treating to different stations throughout the kindergarten, without having contact with the other classes.

Photos taken on the day of observation



*Table 6.3 Public3 Kindergarten's Halloween activities schedule
Senior class, 30th October 2017*

<p>8:30- 9:00 Classroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children arrived at kindergarten wearing a costume and gathered in their classroom, which was decorated with some spider webs and paper pumpkins, to wait for the beginning of the Halloween activities - Six parents volunteered to help with the event and were dressed up as well - In the classroom a happy Jack-o'-lantern was being projected on the screen and English Halloween songs were being played - Circle time: Teacher Wen told the children they were going to have a dress up parade and take part in some fun Halloween games, as well as go trick-or-treating throughout the kindergarten - A few children presented their costumes to the class and they all practiced saying "trick-or-treat" in English
<p>9:00-9:30 Stations throughout the kindergarten</p>	<p>Activity 1: Trick-or-treating Led by their teachers and accompanied by volunteer parents, the children went to different stations set up throughout the kindergarten and received candy, which they put in their trick-or-treat bags (mostly felt and plastic</p>

	pumpkins/ Jack-o'-lanterns); they all had to say 'trick-or-treat' when asking for candy
9:30– 10:30 Auditorium	<p>Activity 2: Dress up parade in the Auditorium: “The Halloween Costume Show”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - K2-1 was partnered with a pre-K class and pairs were formed with a child from each class; the pairs paraded down a green carpet; - The teachers and parents also walked down the runway; <p>Activity 3: Games in the Auditorium: Halloween Party</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children could choose from a selection of games, like: - Decorating paper pumpkins - Taking part in a rolling pumpkin competition - Making a Halloween puzzle - Making a googly-eyed pumpkin monster

Photos from Public3’s WeChat Post on Halloween, 2017



<i>Table 6.4 Christmas-related questions in Public1 and Public3 Kindergartens</i>	
1.	Did you celebrate Christmas in 2017? If yes, please give some examples.
2.	How did you help your child celebrate Christmas last year?
3.	What did you teach your child about Christmas?
4.	What does Christmas mean to you?
5.	Do you think it is important for your child to understand Western culture? What do you think of 'Western' culture?
Notes:	Public1 – 42 respondents; Public3 – 39 respondents The questionnaire was distributed in Mandarin

Source: March 2018 parent questionnaire

Table 6.5 Public1 Kindergarten's December 2017 events calendar

星期日 Sunday	星期一 Monday	星期二 Tuesday	星期三 Wednesday	星期四 Thursday	星期五 Friday	星期六 Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Note: In December, as obvious from the national flag marking each festival, the kindergarten celebrated five Chinese events, but Christmas is also featured on the calendar. Moreover, the two solar terms are also present (the 'Heavy snow- *daxue* 大雪' of 7th Dec. and the 'Winter solstice - *dongzhi* 冬至' of 21st Dec.)

Table 6.6 Public1 Christmas activities schedule
Chinese Stream Senior Class K2-1, 25th December 2017

9:00 – 9:15	Circle time I	Discussion about how the children celebrated Christmas Eve at home What elements/ symbols/ traditions do the children associate with Christmas?
9:15 – 9:25	Walk to international classes	Children looked at the Christmas-related Teaching Board and Teacher YY explained the key words Also looked at: Xmas tree card craft and trimmed Christmas tree Teacher YY explained what the decorations are *carols playing in the background *the international class children were not present
9:25 – 9:35	Circle time II	Short group discussion about what they had seen Teacher YW leading questions to further explain Christmas
9:35 – 9:40	Snack time	Cups and milk on the table (4-5 kids per table) and the children serve themselves to biscuits
9:40– 10:15	Activity	In the Bedroom Class

		Weaving scarves as a New Year's gift for the parents and individual reading (small selection of Chinese books)
10:15-10:20	Toilet & water break	
10:20-11:00	Lesson/ PE outdoors	Class divided into two groups, one to go outside for the morning PE class, the other to have a class with 2 other teachers; alternate every 2 days 'Traffic Signs' class, where the children used cubes marked with different signs to scan them and programme a 'car' to go from point A to point B on a large plastic map on the floor (programme the car to take them to school)
11:00-11:10	Toilet & water break	
11:10-11:50	Lunch	Children serve themselves and clean-up their dishes
11:50-12:00	Walk and TV	Short walk along the corridor after lunch, typical in all observed kindergartens, as it helps with the children's digestion and is mandated by the Shanghai Education Bureau; Watch a short video (projector screen and computer in each class)
12:00-14:300	Nap time	
14:30-15:00	Getting dressed & snack	Getting dressed Snack time Short free play time
15:00-16:00	Afternoon activity	
16:00-16:15	Preparing to go home	
16:15	Going home	

*Table 6.7 Vignette on Public1 Kindergartens' Christmas activity
Chinese stream senior class, 25th December 2017
Circle Time Vignette part 1*

Context:

As my previous work experience as a kindergarten teacher in Shanghai gave me good insight into how Christmas is celebrated in private bilingual English-Mandarin kindergartens, my goal was to observe what I considered to be the most 'Westernised' public kindergarten during its celebration of this holiday. Hence, I spent the whole morning of 25th December 2017 at Public1, observing a local stream K2 class during their morning activities.

I arrived in K2-1 before 9 a.m., curious to see how Christmas was going to be celebrated in the local stream, especially because Teacher Yun had told me their Chinese students don't get to be directly exposed to Western culture. Teacher Yun waited for me by the main gate and led me to the classroom, waiting by my side during Circle Time and accompanying

me on the children's visit to an international K2 class. I believe the kindergarten's management wanted to keep an eye on me during my visit and ensure I had a positive experience, which would cast their kindergarten in a good light (maintaining the kindergarten's reputation is one of management's main goals). While the children did not seem bothered by our presence, I felt we put pressure on the homeroom teachers, who were being observed by both a Western researcher and the international stream coordinator, Teacher Yun.

Circle Time Vignette, part 1

Teacher Wu: Everybody knows what Christmas is, right? Did you celebrate Christmas at home yesterday?

Class: We have.

Teacher Wu: How did you celebrate it? Can you give me some examples?

Girl1: Yesterday I went with my family to a friend's house to play and my mum gave me an apple.

Teacher Wu: Why did she give you an apple?

Class: Because today is Christmas!

Teacher Wu: So what day was yesterday? [Short pause - some children murmur the answer] Yes, very good, Christmas Eve (平安夜 ping'an ye), the 24. December.

Girl2: I also went to a friend's house and we played together. Many other kids also came over and we played together.

Boy1: Yesterday I went and watched a movie with my mum and dad and I got books and a car as Christmas presents.

Teacher Wu: How were your gifts wrapped? [Short pause - the boy has difficulty answering] Were they in a Christmas stocking? Do you know what a Christmas stocking is?

Class [very excited]: Yes, it's red!

Teacher Wu: Which colours tell us Christmas has arrived?

Class: White, red, green!

Teacher Wu: Yes, and sometimes a bit of gold. Anything else you can tell me about Christmas? What else did you do yesterday?

Boy2: I watched a video on my mum's laptop about where Santa comes from and how he visited Shanghai. I told my dad what gifts I want Santa to bring me.

Teacher Wu: So who do you think brings you gifts on Christmas Eve?

Class: Santa Claus! (圣诞老人 = Old Man Christmas)¹

Teacher Wu: What does Santa Claus look like?

Class [talking over each other]: He has a white beard, wears red clothes and a red cap, and has a bag with gifts.

Teacher Wu: What else did you do on Christmas Eve?

Girl3: Yesterday evening I saw Santa Clause with a bag of presents taking them to the reception desk in my building. And he also brought me a gift, I found it this morning.

Girl4: I got two Christmas presents, one from my parents and one from my teacher.

Teacher Wu: So on Christmas you can have a party with your friends, you will get presents...does anything else happen on Christmas? What special foods do we eat?

Boy3: We can eat Christmas cookies.

Girl5: We can eat chicken.

¹ I used the translation 'Santa Claus' instead of 'Father Christmas' because most of the children know the figure only as 'Santa Claus,' partly because this was the name used in the international classes, where the curriculum includes American holidays and American nomenclature.

Teacher Wu: I see, chicken. Does anyone know what kind of chicken we eat?

Class: Turkey.

Teacher Wu: How do we say ‘turkey’ in English?

Boy4 [in English]: *Turkey!* [The entire class repeats the word ‘turkey’ in English]

Note: As the discussion took place in Mandarin, I strove to deliver an English translation that was as accurate as possible. However, given that Mandarin is a language that cannot always be translated verbatim, some sentences reflect substantive content rather than literal representation. To maintain the anonymity of both the children and teachers, I use the generic labels ‘girl,’ and ‘boy,’ with numbers to indicate different speakers.

Table 6.8 Vignette on Public1 Kindergartens’ Christmas activity

Chinese stream senior class, 25th December 2017

Circle Time Vignette part 2

Teacher Wu: We have seen a lot of Christmas decorations in the classroom and on the corridor, right? So what do we have at Christmas?

Boy1: I saw a Christmas tree.

Teacher Wu: Yes, there are Christmas trees. A tall and big Christmas tree. What else?

Girl1: I saw colourful lights.

Teacher Wu: We will hang a lot of colourful lights on a Christmas tree. Is there more?

Boy2: And gifts.

Teacher Wu: Yes, under the Christmas tree, there are a lot of beautifully wrapped gifts.

Girl2: And there are a lot of beautiful baubles on the tree.

[...]

Teacher Wu: Beautiful colourful baubles in amazing colours. What else? What is on the top of the tree? [Short pause] It’s a shining star, right? Besides the Christmas tree, what did you just see?

Girl3: Bells.

Teacher Wu: So there are also bells. Have you heard of a song called Jingle Bells [she says the name of the carol in English] about Christmas? [short pause] Besides the Christmas tree, what else have you seen?

Boy3: Santa [圣诞老人 shengdan laoren = Old Man Christmas]

Teacher Wu: Santa

Boy4: Bow

Teacher Wu: What was the English sentence written on it?

Class [in English]: Merry Christmas!

Teacher Wu: We saw a red bow. So we can also give it another name, the Christmas Bow. What else? I will give you a hint. [She raises her hands to her forehead and makes a gesture for antlers]

Class: Reindeer!

Teacher Wu [Points towards a picture]: What is this? Candy cane, candy shaped like a cane. What else?

[...]

Teacher Wu: So in a lot of places, it will be snowing during Christmas. You can build snow men. There are a lot of beautiful snowflakes. So who helps Santa to deliver gifts?

Clas: The reindeer!

Girl3: There is also the gingerbread man.

Teacher Wu: It turns out that at Christmas, the decorations around us will make us feel the joy of the festival. The sugar cane, the bells, the Christmas tree, the Christmas wreaths, Santa, the reindeer, are all symbols of Christmas. So, do you know why Christmas exists? Let me ask you a question, and see if you know: is Christmas a Westerner's holiday or a Chinese festival?

Class: It's a Western holiday.

Teacher Wu: Good. So, why does Christmas exist?

Boy4: Because it's a foreigners' festival.

Teacher Wu: Yes. So why do foreigners celebrate Christmas?

Boy5: They celebrate the day Jesus was born.

Teacher Wu: We have three major religions in the world: Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Jesus is a Christian God, so Christmas is to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Jesus was born on Christmas day, so Westerners believing in Christianity all celebrate Christmas to celebrate Jesus. So I'd like to ask you a question. Our Chinese children and big friends all like Christmas, right? But we also need to know that we are Chinese, and there are many lively festivals in China. What are the most important festivals we have?

Class: The Spring Festival!

Teacher Wu: Yes. The Spring Festival, New Year's Day. What other traditional festivals do we have in China?

Boy6: The Double Ninth Festival.

Girl4: We also have Mother's Day and Thanksgiving Day in China.

Teacher Wu: Are Mother's Day and Thanksgiving Day traditional Chinese festivals or traditional Western holidays? Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, Father's Day are all western festivals, but because we want to show gratitude toward our parents, we will also celebrate these festivals, right? Anything else? In addition to the Spring Festival, New Year's Day and Double Ninth Festival, what traditional festivals do we have?

Class: The National Day.

Teacher Wu: The National Day is the festival for our motherland's birthday.

Class: The Lantern Festival.

Teacher Wu: We eat dumplings and hang lanterns during the Lantern Festival.

Girl5: We also celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Teacher Wu: Yes. This is the festival to look at the moon and eat moon cake.

Boy7: We also have the Spring Festival.

Teacher Wu: We have just mentioned the Spring Festival. What is the festival where we race dragon boats? [Short pause] The Dragon Boat Festival. We also eat rice dumplings then. See, our China has a lot of traditional festivals. I hope when you are celebrating these western festivals, such as Christmas and Easter Day, you will also get to know and celebrate our traditional Chinese festivals, right?

Class: Right!

Girl 6: What about Easter?

Teacher Wu: Easter is also a western holiday.

Photos taken during the day of observation

Visited international classroom decorations



The Chinese stream classroom decorations



The Chinese stream classroom (from left to right): morning snack, class on transportation, and arts and crafts



*Table 6.9 Public2's New Year dress up parade photos
29th December 2017*





*Table 6.10 Public2 Kindergarten's New Year dress up parade observation notes
Senior class, 29th December 2017*

The moment I entered K2-1 classroom, I was greeted by Teachers Xiao and Mei, the first being dressed as an ancient Chinese princess, and the latter as a white cat, and was given a red Christmas cape to blend in. Before the main event of the day the children were asked to take their usual seats and either watch a Disney movie (“The Croods”) or talk freely. I thus had the opportunity to listen to their conversations, the one standing out being between three girls who were comparing the Christmas gifts they had received at home, as well as another between a boy and a girl who were debating whether Santa was real or not. These candid, unguided conversations indicate that these children had previous knowledge of Christmas, and that it had not been disseminated by the two homeroom teachers. Moreover, out of the over 30 children present, only two wore traditional Chinese clothing, the majority having opted for Disney and Marvel heroes.

The costumes I took note of in K2-1 on 29th December 2017 were those of a unicorn, a dinosaur, many princesses, knights and kings, Elsas and Annas from “Frozen,” Spider-Man, Iron Man, Batman, Show White, wizards and witches, Totoro (from Japanese anime “My Neighbour Totoro”), Mickey Mouse, Santa, and only two traditional Chinese costumes, one being an emperor’s garb and the other a qipao). Less than half of the parents wore a costume and most of them matched their children’s.

During Circle Time Teacher Shan introduced Minnie and Mickey Mouse, two volunteer parents in disguise, who were there to interact with the children throughout the morning and tells them they will first take part in a parade, together with their parents, and then in a best costume competition. The parade is opened by Teacher Xiao and her cohort of Chinese princesses, who walk in a row around the inner yard, waving and posing for the children and parents. Then, on upbeat and eclectic Western music, the parade begins, with classroom after classroom taking centre stages and being applauded by everyone. This event was an amazing opportunity to see globalisation at work, as by just taking the music and costumes into account, this parade could have taken anywhere in the world. The moment that stuck with me was an entire class being dressed up as the minions from *Despicable Me*.

The parade ended with the principal thanking everyone and wishing them a happy new year, as well as inviting them to sing the national anthem, while some K2 children performed the raising of the flag ceremony. Finally, “Happy New Year” was sung in Chinese, with each class forming a circle and the children dancing in pairs, as the teaching staff was hovering and trying to take as many pictures as possible to capture the great success of this activity. Returning to the classroom, Teacher Xiao accompanied the children

on the piano, while they sing together. Then, we all watched a recording of each child thanking his/her loved ones for all they had done in 2017, the filming having taken place in front of the Christmas tree in the classroom. Finally, the parents and children exchanged gifts under the tree, which was again captured on film, for more posts on the classroom's informal WeChat account. Moreover, each child received their 'Secret Santa' gift and excitedly showed-off their new toys.² The New Year Parade ended with the children sharing lunch in a common area, which was a buffet of Chinese dishes in a space decked in Christmas garlands, poinsettias, and a big Christmas tree.

*Table 6.11 Public3 Kindergarten New Year Show observation
26th December 2017
Vignette on 'What is your favourite holiday and why?'*

Teacher LinLin: Which holiday do you like best and why?

Girl1: Christmas. Because...it's fun.

Girl2: I also like Christmas.

Teacher LinLin: Also Christmas! Why?

Girl2: Because we can get many presents.

Girl3: I like the Spring Festival because I can set fireworks.

Boy1: I like Easter because for Easter we have colorful eggs.

Girl4: I like the Spring Festival best...I get money.

Girl5: Easter, because there are little rabbits.

Boy2: I like the Tree Festival, because there are many people planting trees.

Girl6: I like colorful eggs.

Boy3: That's Easter!

Girl7: Easter, because there are rabbits.

Boy4: I like Halloween, because...[never finishes his sentence]

Boy5: I like Easter, because of the colourful eggs.

Girl8: I like Halloween, because I get candy.

Girl9: I like Halloween too, because I can get a lot of sweets.

Girl10: Easter, because of the little rabbits.

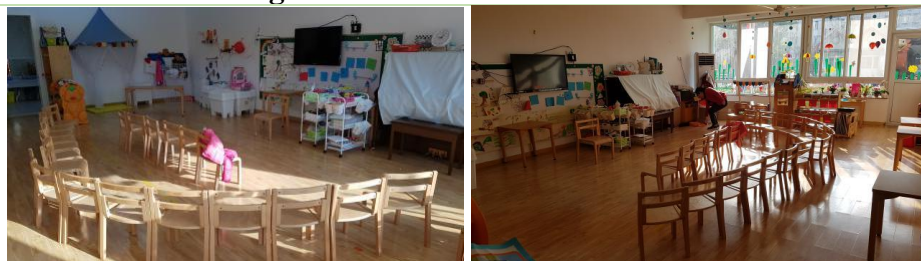
Girl11: Halloween, because it's my birthday.

Boy12: I also like Halloween, because of the costumes.

Boy13: I also like Halloween, because for Halloween I can wear strange clothes.

Boy14: I like the Mid-Autumn festival because...[never finishes his sentence]

Photos taken during the observation



² The previous week before each child pulled the name of a classmate out of a box and prepared a Christmas gift for that child. The wrapped presents were brought to kindergarten during the week and placed under the Christmas tree.



Public3 Kindergarten - Chinese New Year WeChat Post, February 2018

'Happy Chinese New Year, Happy New Semester' (红红火火中国年, 快快乐乐新学期)



Table 6.12 Parental agency in circumventing public kindergarten curricula and the Centre's response

'Anti-subject learning' is a core guideline in each Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (STYAP) since 2006, regulating educational targets across kindergartens towards integrated development, and clearly forbidding the usage of school-related learning, as defined by Cochran (2011). The acquisition of primary school-level knowledge used to be the norm in top public kindergartens in Shanghai prior to 2006, but the STYAPS and the 2010 Education Reform sparked a legislative shift towards promoting 'happy growth.' In line with Shanghai Education Bureau (SEB) official Huang (EO1), recent ECE legislation in Shanghai revolves around "*thinking from the children's perspective, letting the children's life become more suitable for their age, and not letting them be treated as adults and take classes like they would in primary school.*"

In an interview with media expert Carol (ME5), who has been covering ECE in Shanghai for years and whose child also attended a leading demonstration kindergarten while also taking private English lessons since the age of three, Shanghai's socio-economic elite support the SEB-driven anti-subject learning practices on a theoretical level, but not in practice. Accordingly, "*while there is no need to learn primary school-level knowledge in kindergarten, if we consider the current situation of daily requirements in primary schools, I think it will be very difficult for children who only play all day in kindergarten to cope well in a formal school setting. For children to acclimatise well to the demanding primary school environment in Shanghai, they must have good learning habits from kindergarten, as well as a strong foundation in Chinese, Maths and English*" (Ibid.). In her opinion, the responsibility of getting senior class children ready for primary school and setting them up for academic success lies on the parents' shoulders and can only be addressed by enrolling these children in a multitude of extracurricular lessons as early as possible.

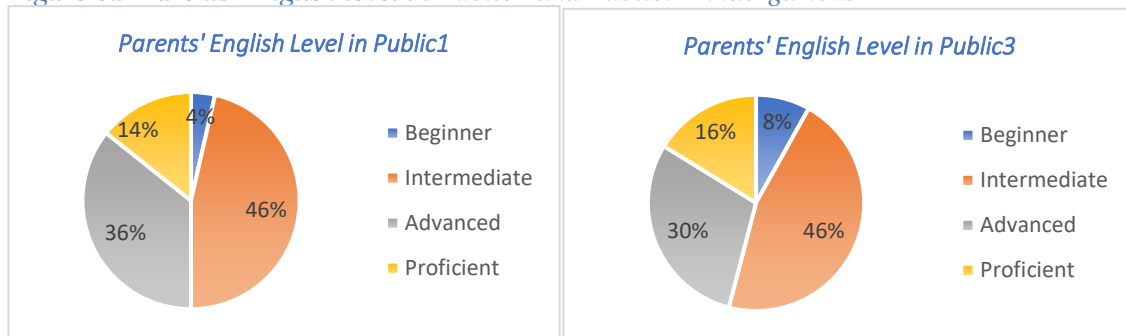
From my personal experience as a part-time English tutor at a successful Shanghaiese training centre, I can confirm this trend, as every weekend from 9 a.m. to 6

p.m. the centre was filled with 5-6-year-old children learning English in a formal setting in 2-3 hour sessions like Phonics or Basic Reading (where teachers would usually perform drilling exercises, as well as, at the parents' request, hold regular assessment tests, the only fun games being spelling competitions).

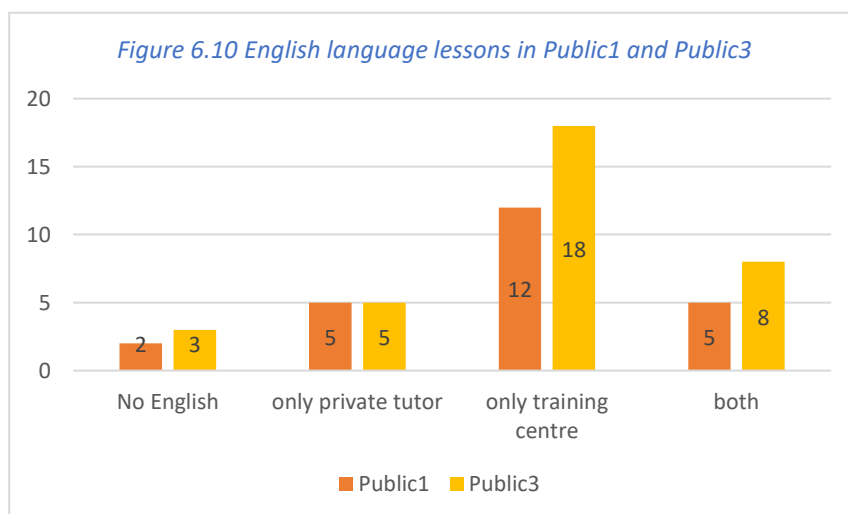
To confirm my theory that public kindergarten parents are using circuitous ways to resist the SEB-driven curriculum used in Space2, I designed a parent questionnaire to collect data on the extracurricular activities they were enrolling their children in during the academic year 2017-2018, the importance they assign to their offspring learning English, and on their own English proficiency.

Regarding the parents' English level, the data clearly shows that more than three quarters of the parents speak good English, according to their personal assessment. Thus, in Public1 only one respondent classified herself as a beginner, with 82% assessing their level to be advanced or proficient (Figure 6.9). In Public3, where many of the parents are educators, only 8% claimed to be beginners, while 76% said they were at least advanced English users (Figure 6.9).

Figure 6.9 Parents' English level in Public1 and Public3 Kindergartens

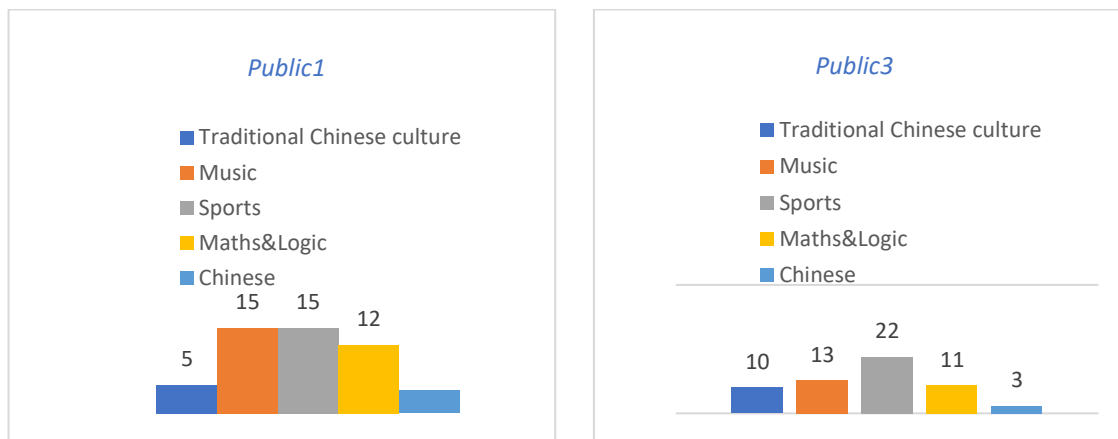


In line with my expectations, 92% all the respondents said their child is learning English as a foreign language. In Public1 only 2 children out of 28 did not take any English lessons, while an overwhelming 93% were having some form of English lessons, with 46% being enrolled in an English training centre and 36% having an English tutor. At Public3, only 3 out of 37 children were not learning English, with 73% attending a training centre and 35% having a private teacher (Figure 6.10).



For the extracurricular lessons, excluding English, I grouped the activities into 6 categories, namely (1) traditional Chinese culture, (2) music, (3) sports, (4) Maths and Logic, (5) Chinese and (6) art. Only the first category is relevant for the current analysis, as it connects with the section assessing the parents' views on Chinese identity and culture and their agency in disseminating it to their children. As follows, under the category 'traditional Chinese culture,' I assigned calligraphy, Chinese painting, the Chinese classics, ethnic dances, and Chinese Go. In Public1 each activity except learning the classics was mentioned once, by different respondents. Public3 kindergarten saw traditional Chinese culture mentioned only 10 times as well, by 10 different respondents, with calligraphy getting 4 votes, and Chinese Go, the Chinese Classics and Chinese painting amassing 2 votes each. No children were learning to play a traditional musical instrument, and only two were learning the Chinese classics, which contradicted my initial expectations, since many of the parents had emphasised the importance of teaching their children about traditional Chinese culture in other parent questionnaire questions (see Chapter 5).

Figure 6.11 Extracurricular Activities in Public1 and Public3 Kindergarten



To explore further whether there is a connection between English not being taught in public kindergartens, not even in level one polities, where budget constraints are not an issue, and the Centre's strategy to curb the dissemination of Western culture, I carried out an interview with Official Hei (EO3), from the Minhang Education Bureau. My aim was to see whether Beijing was thinking of formulating a clear nation-wide ECE policy for teaching English as a foreign language, or if Shanghai has such a local policy in place, as well as if Space1.1 (the Shanghai and local education bureaus) perceives teaching English in public kindergartens as a threat to Chinese culture. The interview took place in January 2018, well after the 19th National Congress, and because I was recommended to this official and ensured her anonymity she felt comfortable to speak candidly. She explained that the Centre does not think of English as a threat to its nation-wide policy of nationalist revival, as it does not construct it as a carrier of Western culture, but as an instrument to make the future generations of Chinese more competitive on the international labour market.

Since English is being taught in all Shanghainese schools starting with grade one (when the pupils are 6-7 years old)³ Official Hei confirmed that learning a foreign language is becoming an important part of Chinese education, especially in urban spaces, and that the government is working on developing a functioning, nation-wide foreign language policy.

³ At present, compulsory education in China generally regulates that the starting time of English learning is third grade three in primary school, while English learning in Shanghai starts two year earlier, namely in first grade.

She pointed out that, until recently, the focus had been on teaching English for exam purposes, with an outdated curriculum shaped by memorisation and grammar exercises, but a better approach would include some cultural immersion aspects like learning the culture that comes with learning a new language, which would cause parents to appeal less to training schools: *“The reason why China is still very chaotic [in teaching English in schools] is that English is a key examination subject, so people perceive it as a learning tool. And it is indeed a very important tool. But, in fact, regarding the concept of a foreign culture as encompassing both the language itself and its respective culture, the degree of acceptance of language learning from the heart is still not high”* (EO3).

Official Hei confirmed the findings from the public kindergarten parent questionnaires, namely that, from the parents’ perspective, English learning should start from kindergarten: *“As children are sensitive to language learning at the age of 4-6 years old, I sent my child to learn English since she was 4 years old. At that age [at the English training centre] she got to know about Western culture and about proper English pronunciation and intonation, instead of memorising words or learning grammar, as is being taught in school. Besides, now Chinese children are familiar with western festivals such as Christmas and Halloween, but they don’t know the deeper culture behind them. So, my child can experience their culture when she is learning English, but only superficially, while she is having fun.”*

The official’s mentioning of Christmas and Halloween as representative Western holidays was in no way a result of my asking leading questions and reinforced my choice of these two celebrations as representative for Western culture. Moreover, for her these festivals are not disseminating western liberal culture, but are perceived as pure entertainment, opportunities for children to enjoy themselves. This interview is proof that the Centre has no clear framework on English learning in ECE in the immediate future, and at present has no control over what the young generations of urban Chinese are learning in terms of Western culture in training schools, where the English teachers are mostly foreigners, many of them native English speakers.

Table 7.1 Centre - Space3 Levels of analysis

Dominant discourse - legislation	National level	2010 Education Reform - key document: Development Plan 2013 Private Education Promotion Law 2016 Law on Private Education
	Local level	Four rounds of Three-Year Action Plans - 2006-2008 - 2011-2013 - 2016-2018 - 2019-2021
Dominant discourse -implementation of legislation -celebration of national day and Spring Festival	Local education officials	- interviews with three education officials, one from the SEB and two from the MEB - interviews with 2 private kindergarten principals - interviews with 5 private kindergarten teachers (3 from Private1 and 2 from Private2)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - observations of Spring Festival celebrations in both kindergartens - analysis of related social media posts
<p>Counter-discourses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -implementation of legislation -celebration of Halloween and Christmas 	<p>Kindergarten staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - thematic analysis of qualitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interviews with 2 private kindergarten principals - interviews with 5 private kindergarten teachers (3 from Private1 and 2 from Private2) - observations of Halloween and Christmas-related celebrations in both kindergartens - analysis of related social media posts
<p>Counter-discourses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECE realities in Shanghai 	<p>Kindergarten parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - thematic analysis of quantitative (Private2) and qualitative (Private1) data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one round of parent questionnaires in 2 private kindergartens

Table 7.2 Private1 Kindergarten overview

- This kindergarten branch, a level 2 according to the official ranking, has been operating in Minhang district for over 2 decades and is part of a large Chinese-owned education group whose owner used to work for the local education bureau.
- In the academic year 2017-2018 it enrolled more than 500 children in the age-groups pre-K, K1 and K2, offering a Chinese (local stream) and a bilingual English - Mandarin one. For K2 (5-6-year-olds), it had 3 bilingual classes and 2 Chinese ones.
- The fee for the bilingual stream was 4600 RMB/ month, plus 16 RMB/ day the food fee, while for the local stream it matched that of a level 2 public kindergarten, so 330 RMB/ month.
- The main entry requirement was for at least one of the parents to own a house in the community; it didn't matter if the parents had a Shanghai *hukou* or *shenfengzhen* as long as they owned a residence in the vicinity of the kindergarten.

Source: Interviews with Private1 management and staff

Table 7.3 Private2 Kindergarten overview

- This kindergarten branch is part of a Hong Kong-based chain that has been operating for over 50 years in Hong Kong and over 2 decades in Shanghai.
- It is a grade one level one (*yiji yilei* 一级一类) kindergarten that uses bilingual education and implements a dual class teacher system in English and Mandarin, providing an immersive bilingual learning environment; it also is accredited to use an IB PYP curriculum; it has two streams, a bilingual English-Mandarin one and a Chinese one, but the majority of classes are bilingual.
- The annual tuition fee for the bilingual stream is 98,400 RMB, while for the Chinese stream it is 54,000 RMB, plus a meal fee of 330RMB/ month.

Source: Interviews with Private2 management and staff (2017-2018)

*Table 7.4 Private1 Halloween activities
31st October 2017*

1	Haunted house	Built using dark kitty board in a dark corridor, this small room was decorated with jack-o-lanterns and spider lights and had ghosts and spider web hanging from the ceiling. In pairs, the children explored the room and listened to the spooky music playing in the background
2	Pumpkin hunt	Small plastic Jack-o-lanterns were hidden across the inner yard and the children had to find them, similar to an Easter egg hunt
3	Pumpkin carving	Each class had a large pumpkin that the teachers and children carved together. Also, some children brought some small pumpkins from home and they decorated them with arts and crafts materials.
4	Halloween songs and videos	Short movie and Halloween songs with videos in each classroom, where the kids ate popcorn and watched Winnie the Pooh's Halloween
5	Crafts	Guided by their teachers, the children used paper plates to make Jack-o-lanterns and spider webs with play dough spiders
6	Going trick-or-treating	Two classrooms at a time, the children, wearing their costume of choice and holding plastic Jack-o-lantern bags, went trick-or-treating throughout the kindergarten and received candy from the staff

*Table 7.5 Private2 Halloween activities
31st October 2017*

1	Haunted house	In pairs, the children went through a haunted house, which was organised in a small activity room and had ghost and skeletons hung from the ceiling, as well as spooky music
2	Going trick-or-treating	One classroom at a time, the costumed children, each carrying a Jack-o'-lantern paper bags, went trick-or-treating throughout the

		kindergarten and received candy from the volunteer parents and staff
3	Dress up parade	
4	Halloween songs and videos	Short movie and Halloween songs with videos in each classroom, where the kids ate popcorn and watched selected cartoons
5	Crafts	Guided by their parents and teachers, the children decorated a paper bag to look like a Jack-o-lantern, which they then used for going trick-or-treating; they also decorated a mask of their choice
6	Special activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pinning a spider on a spiderweb 2. Halloween sticker tattoos: this activity was coordinated by volunteer mothers, who gave each child a few sticker tattoos 3. 'Candy and spoon' race 4. Treasure hunt 5. Pumpkin bowling 6. Brewing a witch's potion
7	Halloween PE routine	The morning PE routine had the Skeleton Dance added to it just for this celebration, which the children had practiced in their individual classes for days
8	Photo booth	The kitty board booth had a lot of Halloween-related props that the children and parents used to take funny pictures together
9	Halloween birthday celebration	Thematic sweet treats for everyone, like pumpkin-shaped cookies and spider cupcakes

*Table 7.6 Vignette on Private1 Kindergarten's Christmas lesson
Senior class, Bilingual English- Mandarin stream, lesson in English
22nd December 2017*

Teacher Vicky: What is today's date?

Boy: December 22.

Teacher Vicky: Very good! And are we celebrating anything special in December?

Class: Christmas!

Teacher Vicky: Is Christmas today?

Girl: No, it's on 25 December.

Teacher Vicky: How about Christmas Eve?

Class: 24 December.

Teacher Vicky: Good, how do we say Christmas Eve in Chinese?

Class: 平安夜 (píng'ān yè)

Teacher Vicky: And what happens on Christmas Eve?

Girl: Santa brings presents!

Teacher Vicky: How will Santa go to your house?

Girl: Reindeer and a sleigh.

Teacher Vicky: Where does Santa live?

Boy: North.

Teacher Vicky: yes, Santa lives in Finland, Europe, where there's lots of snow. (the Chinese teacher translates Finland and Europe) How do you think Santa can travel so fast all around the world in one night?

Boy: Magic.
Boy: Reindeer can fly.
Teacher Vicky: Exactly, so where will Santa put your gifts?
Girl: Stockings
Teacher Vicky: Good, anywhere else?
Girl: Under the tree!
Teacher Vicky: Do you have a Christmas tree at home?
Class: Yes/ No (about a third of the children say they have a Christmas tree at home)
Teacher Vicky: Do you think Santa is tired after delivering so many toys?
Class: Yes!
Teacher Vicky: Why?
Girl: The toys are heavy!
Teacher Vicky: So what can we give Santa to help him a bit?
Girl: Milk and cookies
Teacher Vicky: Yes, milk and cookies. How about to the reindeer? They have magic and they can fly on Christmas Eve and they have to pull a very heavy sleigh. What can we give the reindeer?
Boy: Cookies.
Teacher Vicky: What do you guys think?
Class: Cookies!
Teacher Vicky: Ok, so this morning we will share some cookies and snacks you guys have brought today and you have to remember to put a plate of cookies out for Santa and his reindeer on Christmas Eve. And remember to leave your letter for Santa next to the cookies, so he will know what gifts to give you.

*Table 7.7 Private1's China's National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival activities
September 2017*

1. Dragon dance performance (professional dancers)
2. 'Folk music street' (Pipa, Guzheng, Dizi, Erhu, Zhonglu): Folk Music Workshop, where the children can listen to traditional music and try to play the instruments themselves
3. Traditional clothing for children or red clothes (national costumes)
4. Festive decorations along halls and main entrance: flags, Chinese knots, lanterns; the teachers also constructed a big Great Wall for the main lobby, as well as a background with two Chinese flags and Chinese inventions: fireworks, vases, flags
5. Making mooncake: teachers and volunteer parents help the children make mooncakes in the classroom- the children will eat the mooncake after making it
6. Theater performance by the teachers: Group Story - "Come to the Moon" or "Yue Wanyue",
7. Traditional handicrafts: Chinese knot

Notes:

Because in 2017 China's National Day and the Mid-Autumn Festival were very close, Private1 focused more on traditional culture-related activities than on patriotic events.

All the children and teachers wore either traditional Chinese traditional clothes or red ones

*Table 7.8 Private1's Spring Festival activities
7th February 2018*

- Make traditional food, like dumplings, spring rolls and tangyuan
- Calligraphy station: Rice paper, brushes, ink for Chinese painting – write the character for luck; with the parents' help write spring couplets
- Watch a short movie about the origins of the Spring Festival and the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac
- Kung fu yoga
- Chinese paper cutting and origami dogs
- Buffet lunch prepared by the kindergarten, for children and parents to eat together in each classroom

Note: All the children and some of the parents were wearing traditional Chinese clothing, like the qipao and Cheongsam

*Table 7.9 Private2's Lantern Festival activities
22nd February 2018*

- Making tangyuan
- Decorating/ painting paper lanterns
- Assembling in the Concert Hall to dance a traditional dance (5 kids selected from each class) and watch a short Chinese cartoon about the significance of the festival
- Lantern parade in the main hall, where some children got to present their lanterns to the audience
- Riddle games: the children prepared riddles at home and they read them to one another to guess the answer

For the teachers: small celebration where they shared sweets and cakes and ate tangyuan. They all wore something red to celebrate.

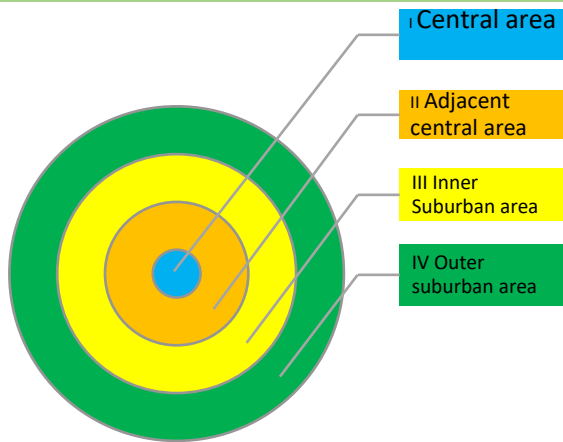
Notes: The children come to kindergarten wearing traditional clothes, like the qipao. Each child brought a paper lantern that they had made themselves at home, as well as a picture collage showing them make the lanterns.

Figure 3.1 The child and learning environments



Source: Boehm and Weinberg (1997), 11

Figure 3.2 Radial chart of Shanghai's 4 administrative zones



Legend:

Zone I- Central area: HuangPu 黄浦, LuWan 卢湾, Jian'An 静安, HongKou 虹口 (4 districts or 区 qu) * In 2011 Luwan district merged into Huangpu district

Zone II: Adjacent central area (5 districts)

XuHui 徐汇, ChangNing 长宁, PuTuo 普陀, ZhaBei 闸北, YangPu 杨浦

Zone III: Inner Suburban area (4 districts)

PuDong 浦东, MinHang 闵行, BaoShan 宝山, Jiading 嘉

Zone IV: Outer suburban area (4 districts)

SongJiang 松江, FengXian 奉贤, JinShan 金山, QingPu 青浦

Source: Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences (2013). Research on the Current Situation, Problems and Countermeasures of Supply and Demand of Basic Education Resources in Shanghai.

Figure 6.9 Parents' English level in Public1 and Public3 Kindergartens

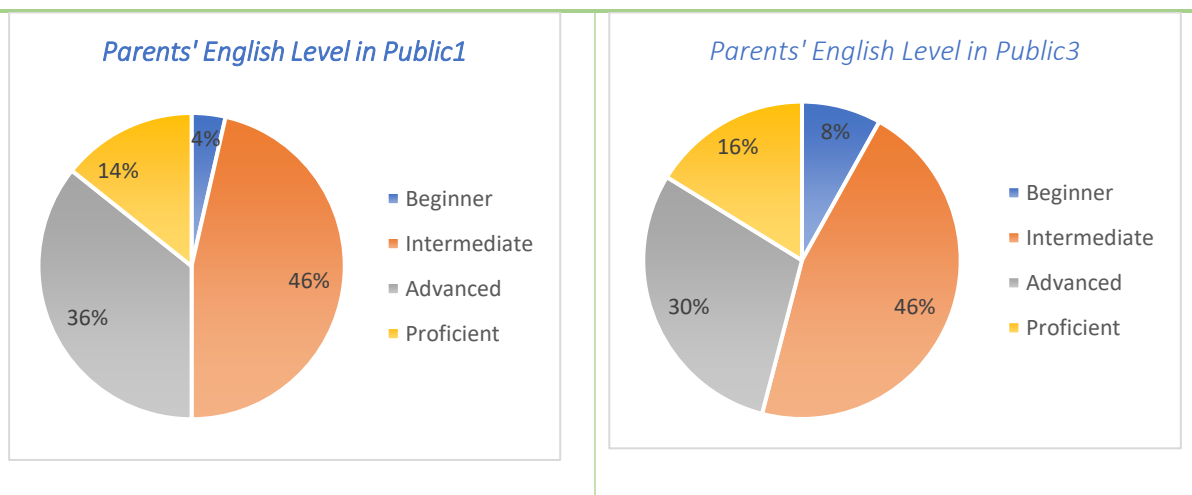


Figure 6.10 English language lessons in Public1 and Public3

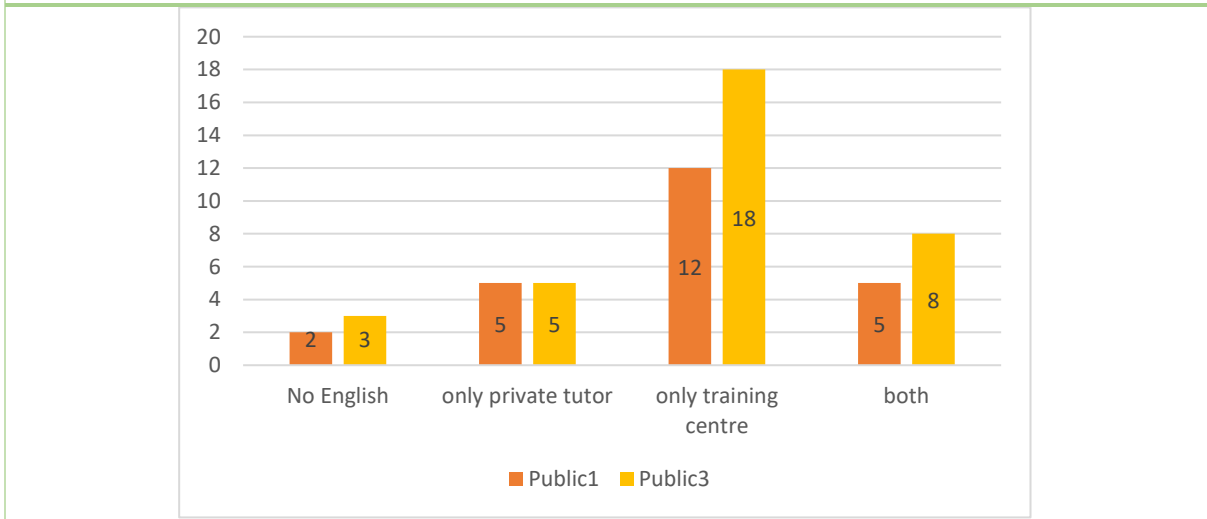


Figure 6.11 Extracurricular Activities in Public1 and Public3 Kindergarten

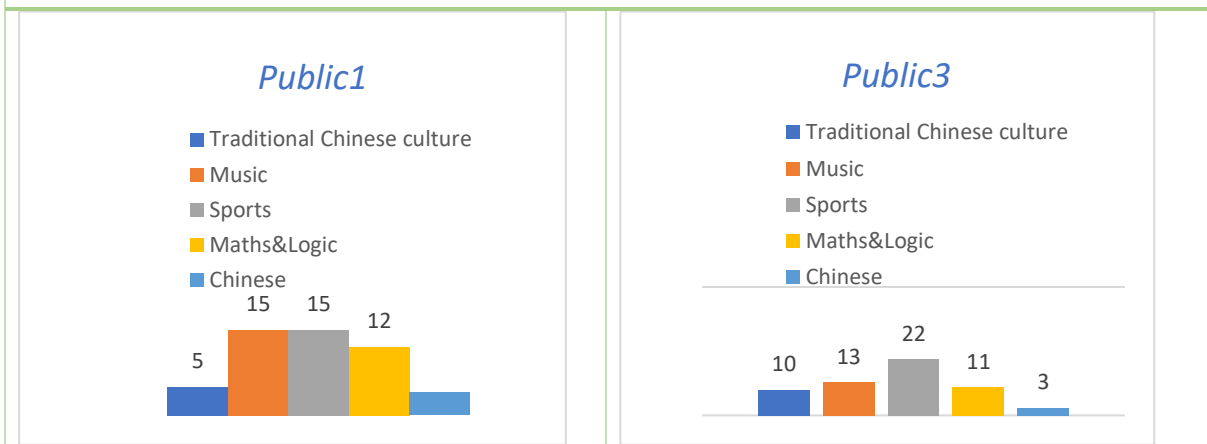


Figure 7.3 Parents' English level in Private1 and Private2 Kindergartens

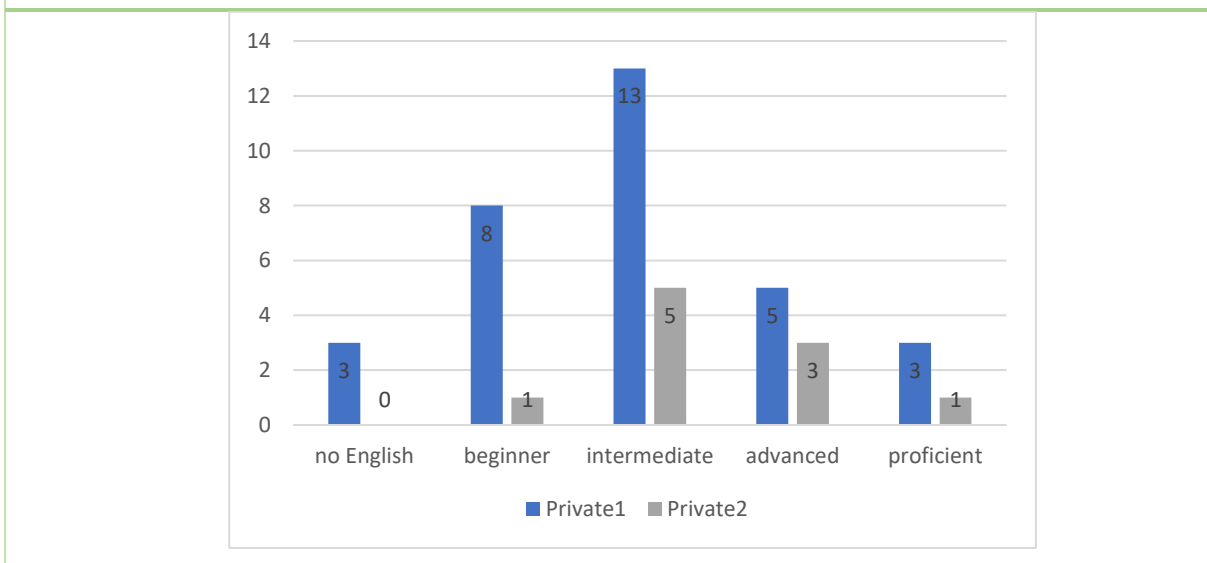


Figure 7.4 Parents' education level in Private1 and Private2 Kindergartens

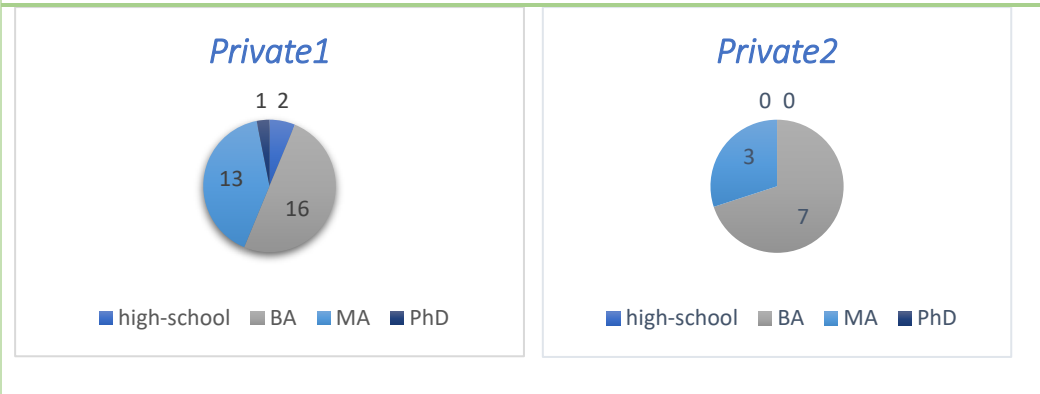
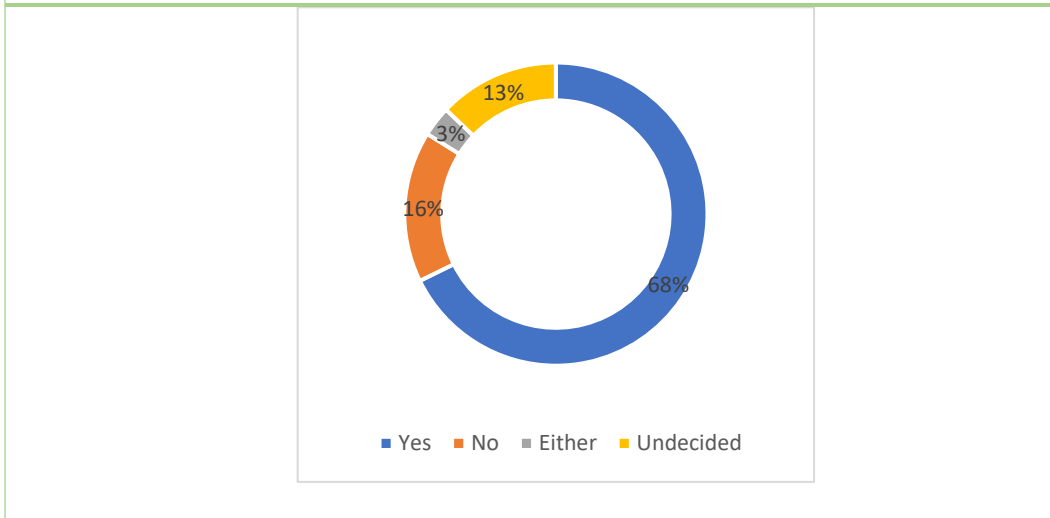


Figure 7.5 Private1: Would you like your child to go to university abroad?



Endnotes

ⁱ As a consequence of the *Two-child policy*, a total of 17.86 million babies were born in 2016, an increase of 1.31 million over the total in 2015 (7.9% increase from the previous year). According to government data, the figure represents the highest annual number of newborns since 2000 (Shan 2017).

ⁱⁱ If this legislation comes to be strictly reinforced, then the logical move for these private education stakeholders would be to shift their focus towards preschool and secondary education, both profitable education sectors, made even more profitable in the immediate future as a consequence of the *Two-child policy*'s birth rate increase, as well as the Centre's reluctance to provide a sufficient budget for ECE, with compulsory education (years 1-9) still being prioritised.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education, which took effect on July 1, 1986 includes six years of primary school, starting at age six or seven, and three years of junior secondary education (middle school) for ages 12 to 15. Some provinces may have five years of primary school but four years for middle school. After middle school, there are three years of high school, which then completes secondary school.

^{iv} According to Vickers (2021) and Joniak-Luthi (2015), the category 'Han' is a artificial construct and its monolithic understanding by the CCP only offers an oversimplified, stereotyped definition, as 'Hanness' is diverse and encompasses a plurality of discourses.

^v According to Bennett (2001), the term 'early childhood' in the international context encompasses the period from birth to the start of compulsory education, while early childhood education and care is typically divided into two stages, namely the infant-toddler period (age 0-3), and the preschool period (ages 3 to 5 or 6). In Scandinavian countries ECE is provided as an integrated and continuous service across that entire age range. As my thesis focuses on kindergartens, I will only discuss the second stage.

^{vi} In some countries the main goal of ECE can be to provide employed parents with trustworthy places where their children are well looked after while the parents are working, while in other countries the purpose can be to narrow the educational gap between low- and high-income families, by providing extra support to children from low-income families to better adapt to primary school (Cochran, 2011).

^{vii} For example, the Finnish national model called 'EDUCARE' integrates childcare services to offer both education and care and is heavily subsidised to be equally available to all families (Vlasov and Hujala 2016).

^{viii} 'Overall development' reflects the Scandinavian approach to education, where the focus is on integrated development, not skills acquisition. At the opposite end on Cochran's 1993 axis is 'subject acquisition,' with the focus on ensuring preschoolers learn the same sets of skills and are prepared to enter primary school.

^{ix} In Sweden, ECE policy is guided by the child's optimal overall development, as young children between the ages of one and five are enrolled in the same preschool centre. The country's national preschool programme is supervised by the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, care and education are separate in France, as the focus is on development for children under three years of age (under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs) and on education for those older than three. Hence, children over three years of age are enrolled in a universal preschool programme called 'école maternelle', overseen by the Ministry of Education.

^x Teachers who use this approach rely on strategies like situating knowledge, multiple readings, and engaging with images (Ryan and Grieshaber 2005).

^{xi} In Italy, a country with a long history of ECE, the concept of 'partecipazione' is at the centre of child development pedagogy, as it "links the daily life of children, family, and school together through practices such as gradual transition from home to school, parental engagement in school activities and planning, [and] projects expanding the school life by bringing children out into the community and community members into the school" (Mantovani 2007: 1112-1113). As children have the same teachers throughout kindergarten, there is more time to gradually develop a strong partnership between educators, parents, and the community (Bove 2007). According to Bove, parents are actively involved in preschool life by daily interactions during drop-off and pick-up time, by parents being on the elected preschool governing board, during regular meetings where both parties share their ideas and expectations, as well as via informal gatherings on special occasions, like holidays and kindergarten events.

^{xii} By distributing parent questionnaires in key preschools in Shanghai, I come to understand who the parents opting for the selected kindergartens are, by assessing both socioeconomic and cultural factors.

^{xiii} Hu, Yang and Jeong conducted a Zhejiang province-based research where they applied a mixed method of Q-sort process and interviews in order to assess 44 Chinese urban and suburban parents' priorities for quality ECE. They sorted these parental views into four categories, namely (1) health and well-rounded development, (2) daily routine and care, (3) environment, and (4) child-centered learning (2016).

^{xiv} A well-researched paper on the development of the ECE workforce in China since 2005 is Fan Xin's 2015 dissertation, where the author shows that, since 2010, China's national strategy has been successful in enhancing the number and quality of ECE teachers.

^{xv} See the third Shanghai Three-Year Action Plan (2015-2017) for guidelines and requirements for teacher qualifications.

^{xvi} In terms of structural continuity, Neuman argues in favour of ECE programmes and primary schools falling under the same administrative auspice, usually the Ministry of Education, while ensuring that the educational balance does not shift markedly towards instruction-based teaching in ECE settings. For pedagogical continuity, most European countries use national ECE curricula designed around ‘cycles of learning,’ meaning that their pedagogical content is designed to facilitate the child’s transition from preschool into primary school. To ensure professional continuity, Neuman advocates for ECE experts and primary school teachers to undergo staff training and teamwork both within a university setting as well as a professional one. The fourth dimension refers to the continuity with home and the community, which takes the form of structured conversations with parents about their children’s development.

^{xvii} Global and local forces interact in a two-way relationship, but in this thesis I only analyse the ways globalisation is shaping Chinese ECE, especially in the locality of Shanghai, and not how Shanghainese kindergartens have in turn been affecting international ECE, for example through exchange programmes.

^{xviii} To Confucius, self, family and the nation society are interrelated. Hence, the better educated an individual, the more prosperous her family, and the more harmonious her nation or society (Xu 2011). This Confucian *state of being* is dichotomous from the Western *state of knowing*. The importance of the family unit in China is expressed in the language, as the term for family “家” (jia) is used for country as “国家” (guojia, or ‘nation family’), as well as for everyone “大家” (dajia, or ‘big family’). The building block of Chinese society is the family unit (Hall and Ames 1999) and stems from the Confucian idea that the world is “世界” (shijie) whose literal translation is “the succeeding generational boundaries,” linking previous and future generations.

^{xix} Woronov (2016), in her ethnographic work on vocational schools in China, argues that the Confucian approach to education has become an elitist phenomenon in China, only applying to the privileged strata.

^{xx} Holistic approaches to ECE recognize the connectedness of mind, body and spirit complete physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of a child. They challenge traditional teaching practices which focus on milestones of academic development, arguing for a rounded approach that takes into account the complete physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of a child (UNESCO, 2002).

^{xxi} Established during the Sui Dynasty (581–618) and existing until 1905, the imperial examination system or *keju* was a way to select government officials. All men, rich and poor alike, could take part in the examinations and had, in the public mind, equal chances to attain honour, wealth and prestige. The *keju* system could be considered to be China’s fifth great invention, after gunpowder, the compass, paper, and movable type (Zhao 2014). It rewarded absolute obedience to the emperor and appealed to all, as it was designed to be perceived as an objective, transparent, and universally accessible system for social mobility. This brilliant construct in terms of social control gave the illusion of individual freedom to achieve prestige and wealth by, at the same time, leaving room for no incentives to pursue anything else. However, this system was intrinsically flawed as it discouraged diversity and creativity. In order to become a public official, one had to memorise and interpret Confucian texts and analyse the current affairs of the time in line with those principles. No counter-thought or resistance was encouraged or tolerated. By design, *keju* generated generations of citizens who were obedient, compliant, and skilled at literary work (Zhao 2014).

^{xxii} The 12 ‘core socialist values’ are now part of President Xi Jinping’s foreign policy discourse, as he used the phrase “peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of all mankind and the lofty goals of the United Nations,” in his address to the 70th UN General Assembly in September 2015 (Sonnad 2015). Xi called the values the “moral and ideological foundation” for socialist China, encouraging authorities to create opportunities where they can be disseminated, in order to “make them all-pervasive, just like air” (Mu 2014). The president also called for the principles to be incorporated into textbooks, classes and schools, as “the soft power of a nation depends on the vitality, cohesive force and charisma of its core values” (Mu 2014). Moreover, they have been translated into action throughout the country, especially during the National Day and the Spring Festival (Du 2016). The same article, published in the mainstream newspaper People’s Daily, stresses that these values also echo the common values shared by mankind and are not only hailed by Chinese leaders, but by the international community as well. Du mentioned, however, that while these socialist values are universal, they are different from Western ones, as the latter “breed turbulence by advocating ‘universal values’ for all”, while “China combines the values with specific situations after drawing their lessons” (2016).

^{xxiii} The history of public ECE in China began in 1903 in Hubei Province, with the opening of Hubei Kindergarten, an ECE institution which followed Japanese teaching methods inspired by Fröbel (Tian 2005). Fröbel’s teaching system had three main features: games and songs, constructions, and what he called “gifts and occupations”, which involved geometrically shaped objects and manipulations for hands-on activities.

^{xxiv} While Huo only uses the term ‘curriculum’ to address ECE development, given the content of his analysis I believe Chinese ‘patterns’ are also implied, so I will use both nomenclatures in my analysis.

^{xxv} As a result, some kindergartens developed their own curriculum, such as the Integrated-Themed curriculum model employed in Shanghai (Shanghai Education Committee 2002).

^{xxvi} Professor Hua Aihua from East China Normal University, one of China's leading universities for education, was a key figure in drafting the *2001 Guidelines*. She emphasized that Western ECE patterns like Reggio, Multiple Intelligences, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, as well as key ideas from Japan were used without being explicitly named. Instead, they were integrated under the concepts of '*respecting children*' and '*children's life-long learning*' (Tobin et al. 2009: 83-84).

^{xxvii} In the Soviet instruction pattern the role of the teacher is that of an active agent who imparts knowledge through direct instruction within a rigid class setting, while the pupil's main responsibility is obedience and the reproduction of the imparted knowledge (Huo 2015).

^{xxviii} To her mind, the goal of the 2001 reform was the creation of a learning environment where pupils are encouraged to be more independent and creative thinkers, and where learning is more aligned to real-life experiences and interests, so as to build skills relevant to a more globalised world (Ryan 2011).

^{xxix} According to Huo, Chinese EC educators rushed to learn and use Western patterns at the detriment of understanding their cultural embeddedness and gaining in-depth knowledge (2015). Hence, methods such as Montessori, the Reggio approach and Multiple Intelligences were re-circulated and taken for granted because of their high quality and strong practicality.

^{xxx} Until 2010, the Ministry of Education focused on reforming compulsory primary and secondary education, neglecting preschool, as government expenditure for ECE was included in primary school budgets. Moreover, to further support the ambitious 2020 targets, the Rural Preschool Development Plan was published, with provisions aimed at helping poverty-stricken areas. On the agenda were the construction of new nurseries and kindergartens, renovations, improved educational resources and training for school administrators and teaching staff (Huo 2015).

^{xxxi} At first glance, China has one of the most egalitarian education systems in the world, a meritocracy ensuring nine years of universal compulsory public education and free senior high-school and university education for high achievers. The central government is constantly working on reiterating this perception of education and educational opportunity in the public mind, ensuring the ordinary Chinese believes that everyone, no matter her upstart in life, has a chance to greatness (Woronov 2016). This discourse originates and derives its legitimacy from the historical success of the imperial examination system, a meritocracy-based strategy to select the best candidates for the state bureaucracy (Zhao 2014). However, in reality, socioeconomic factors are key in determining an individual's future achievements. According to Zhao, the exam system is a "*a seductive marketing slogan, persuading individuals to welcome homogenization*" (2014:18), a tactic to move the focus away from individual differences (e.g. special needs) and unequal social conditions, as one is solely responsible for his/her academic performance.

^{xxxii} However, many SOEs and institutions were not willing to transfer their kindergartens to local governments for free, nor were the latter interested to buy them, given budget shortages. As the SOEs were also reluctant to make further investments, many of these kindergartens became insolvent and were purchased by private entities aiming to make a profit.

^{xxxiii} However, this community-driven strategy generated great imbalances in the quality of ECE education between affluent areas and disadvantaged ones, as it is based on the idea of utilizing local resources to operate successfully. If local resources are scarce, it is not feasible for those kindergartens to rely only on an allotted national budget to operate. If communities are not wealthy enough to make financial contributions towards their local ECE institutions, then those kindergartens suffer greatly.

^{xxxiv} The Shanghai Education Bureau is using clearly defined kindergarten assessment criteria and evaluation details in order to confer grades (A to D) to preschools, following periodic inspections. The criteria include staff qualifications (director, teachers, doctors and nurses, cooking, cleaning and security personnel), indoor and outdoor environment, facilities and equipment, expenditures, health and safety, curriculum, pupil evaluations, and overall performance. See: Criteria for grading kindergartens in Shanghai (2011) (上海市幼儿园分等定级评分标准).

^{xxxv} China Education Online CERNET is China's largest education portal (founded in 2001) and aims at providing the Chinese public with a variety of professional education information services, ranging from preschool to university. It operates under the approval of relevant state departments and uses official criteria for its institutional rankings. Its 2013 'China's top 500 kindergartens' is based on research conducted by the DC Centre China (华盛顿中国中心), a public-private partnership whose mission is to develop commercial relationships between Washington, DC and China (see: ch.dccenterchina.org).

^{xxxvi} Initially I planned on using at least two kindergartens for migrant children as a counterbalance to assess value-based world views of less affluent groups, but I reconsidered given the sensitivity of working with this sector and not being able to gain access to any such kindergarten.

^{xxxvii} Halloween especially will allow me to focus on the agency of children, as they will choose their costumes according to their individual preferences and will have time for free play that will reveal their unique imagined worlds. To assess free play related to these events I will use the figured worlds approach (Barron 2014).

^{xxxviii} A healthy direct or participant observation practice is to maintain two separate logs, one for anecdotal records, which are interpretative comments, and one for objective field notes. I followed the techniques suggested

by Cartwright and Cartwright (1984): record events as soon as possible after they occur (hand-written notes), with specific details and sequence of events; gather supporting evidence, like photographs of activities and children's artwork; and provide information about the context in which the observation took place.

^{xxxix} For the first component, it is vital to note the number of children, as well as the boy: girl ratio, the number of teachers, and the classroom arrangement (for example, the reading corner, science corner, water table, arts & crafts area, block area). The second component targets pupil and teacher verbal and nonverbal behaviour, which I will assess according to each activity organised for the selected event. Moreover, I will add a third layer, namely the values-related teaching goals set for the celebration.

^{xl} From my previous work experience as a kindergarten teacher at both private and public kindergartens in Shanghai, I observed that the trend is for grandparents or paid caretakers (called *ayi*) to be responsible for the children's care and education during the week, with parents taking over during the weekends. However, I decided to only interview parents regarding the preschool education of their children, as well as their socioeconomic background and values, as I believe grandparents would only provide me with repetitive and obsolete answers. For example, most grandparents I met were part of the Mao generation, so their opinions had little to contribute to my analysis of how globalisation and socialism interact to create hybrid identities. Moreover, it is the parents who are the key socioeconomic actors shaping Shanghai's current landscape, so it is their voice one has to listen to in order to understand if and how society is interacting with the Centre's discourse on ECE patterns and curriculum.

^{xli} As many preschools in Shanghai use their own application or WeChat groups to maintain a daily dialogue with the parents, I first thought to use such a platform to distribute and collect my questionnaires, but this would have defied the purpose of ensuring anonymity. The option I decided for was to print the questionnaires and ask the classroom teachers to spread them out to the children. I am aware that a hardcopy put extra pressure on the parents to fill out the survey, as an e-format would have been easier to ignore and I could have sent an anonymous survey link to potential respondents, but I decided against it as I wanted to collect as many questionnaires as possible.

^{xlii} I chose Eaten as a research assistant because of her background as a Shanghainese whose parent worked for a local education bureau and the implicit ease of access to local officials, as well as her bachelor's degree in education. She did not just open doors for me and provide insight about ECE in Shanghai, but having her by my side also mitigated the dangers of raising red flags if my fieldwork were to be perceived as too political. Moreover, her mother being a public servant could keep her safe from potential political repercussions.

^{xliii} Kazdin (1982) divides previous experiences between the observer and the observed into two categories: a positive bias, also called a 'halo effect,' is founded on positive experiences and casts the observed in a positive light, while a negative bias is called 'prejudice' and stems from previously unfavourable interactions.

^{xliiii} My analysis of ECE legislation compares key national documents starting with the 2010 Education Reform with local level policies, namely four rounds of STYAPs, where I look at available data to corroborate whether the 2020 goals have been met in Shanghai, as well as whether there is any reference to the dissemination of moral education.

^{xliv} At the moment of completing the thesis there was no reliable document which assessed whether the 2020 goals set by the Education reform had been met nation-wide, but my sources and the information available in the third and fourth STYAPs strongly indicate that Shanghai had met those targets well before 2020 (like 100% kindergarten enrolment of *hukou* holders).

^{xlvi} To learn more about the 2010 Development Plan, Prof. Xin Zhou's article "Early Childhood Education Policy Development in China" is recommended (2015). Her article sheds light on how the policy was developed, as well as its ongoing implementation, mentioning that the public was consulted throughout the development of the draft and that their feedback played an important role in drafting this policy (Zhou 2015: 30), (Xu, et al.: 2010).

^{xlvii} From the 2010 Development Plan I targeted its overall strategy, as well as the first 3 chapters: Chapter 1 contains the Guiding ideology and work guidelines, Chapter 2 deals with Strategic objectives and themes, and Chapter 3 (containing 3 articles), the most relevant for my thesis, is on Preschool education. I also looked at Chapter 14- Reform of the school system, art. 43- Strong support for private education, as the thesis compares public and private kindergartens and these chapters gave the researcher a better understanding of the legislative context of private education. To deepen my understanding of local - global ECE linkages encouraged by the official discourse I included Chapter 16 - Expanding education openness, art. 48 - Strengthening international exchanges and cooperation, and art. 49 - Introducing quality education resources. Chapter 18 - Protection of Funds, art. 56 - Increase investment in education, reflects the extent of the state's financial contribution to the system of public kindergartens, while Chapter 22 - Strengthening organizational leadership, art. 68 - Strengthen and improve leadership in education, and art. 69 - Strengthening and improving the Party's building of the education system, gave a better view of the ideological guidance the Centre wants to provide for the development of ECE curricula and teaching patterns.

^{xlviii} As the purpose of this research was to look at the dissemination of values and citizenship education at kindergarten level, it was important to capture what the 2010 Education Reform had to say about ECE curricula and teaching pattern content. In order to do so, the first step was to clearly understand how relevant legislation defined the terminology related to values and citizenship education, which encompass key terms like ‘core socialist values,’ ‘patriotism,’ and ‘Chinese characteristics.’ Consequently, I scoured the entire *2010 Development Plan* to find clues as to what the mentioned ‘Chinese characteristics’ might entail, but the language used made it difficult to come to a clear definition.

^{xlix} The last chapter of the document, Chapter 22 - Strengthening organizational leadership - repeats the precepts from its Guiding Ideology of following Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Three Represents with the promotion of ‘scientific’ education development, without, yet again, providing a clear definition of what these concepts mean. The only mention of a proposed strategy to develop this scientific approach is to “*strengthen the study of macroeconomic policies and development strategies.*”

^l In terms of the government’s responsibilities, the preschool system, made up of both public and private kindergartens, is defined as government-led, but encourages social participation (art.6). The main goals of the ECE reform are to increase the government’s involvement, formulate preschool education standards, improve kindergarten fee management, and improve the quality of preschool teachers. Improving rural preschool education becomes a focus point as well.

^{li} Chapter 3 - Preschool Education, is almost identical to its counterpart in the Development Plan and does not bring anything new to the analysis

^{lii} However, the document failed to clearly define what the concept of ‘scientific development’ entailed, or to provide scientific curricula and teaching pattern guidelines that kindergartens could follow. Given the plethora of existing literature on ECE, as well as the different practices being used successfully world-wide, by just using the term ‘scientific,’ devoid of a necessary explanation, I posit the Centre did itself a great disservice in achieving its goal of coordinate a meaningful nation-wide ECE reform.

^{liii} Another recommendation regards the improvement of the laws and regulations standardising preschool education management. In line with basic national standards, all localities set standards for various types of kindergartens and implemented classified management and classified guidance. The county-level education administrative department was responsible for approving various types of kindergartens, establishing a kindergarten information management system, and implementing a dynamic supervision of kindergartens.

^{liv} Shanghai has a point redemption scheme for migrant workers/ floating population, where eligible floating residents are awarded points according to their residence, profession and educational qualification.

^{lv} Out of the three districts where the observed kindergartens are situated, namely Putuo, Xuhui and Minhang, only the first two use their own district Three-Year Action Plans. Minhang uses the SEB’s STYAP and also sets its tasks and goals in combination with the *State Council Opinions* and the *Kindergarten Work Regulations*.

^{lvi} This legislation was also developed with consideration to the 2004 Shanghai Committee document No. 12, entitled the *Opinions of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the CPC and the Shanghai Municipal People’s Government* on the comprehensive implementation of comprehensive education reform and the basic realization of Shanghai’s education modernization, as well as the *11th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of Shanghai*.

^{lvii} When it comes to financial investment in preschool education, the 2006 STYAP targeted an increase of capital investment to ensure the smooth implementation of its main measures. Each district, county, township and town was required to arrange special annual funds from their overall education budget to promote the development of preschool education and the construction of kindergartens, as well as encourage enterprises, institutions, social organizations and individual citizens to donate funds for education.

^{lviii} Among the full-time teachers, 93.6% were middle college graduates or above, and 45.95% were college graduates or above. See: *2011-2013 STYAP*, Chapter 1 - Basic Situation, Section 2 - Teaching Staff.

^{lix} One of the measures taken by the Shanghai government in order to increase the quality of kindergarten education was to implement a project entitled “Famous Principals and Teachers Training Project,” (名园长、名教师培养工程 míng yuán zhǎng, míng jiàoshī péiyǎng gōngchéng) where well-known kindergartens were training a number of district and county teachers. This project was a direct response to a directive from the 2010 State Council Opinions on Preschool Education.

^{lx} The topic of ECE budgets in Shanghai and its districts is severely under-researched and it would be interesting to see to what extent the mandates included in each STYAP round were realised, as well as investigate whether the municipal government offered assistance or just asked the districts to find money for meeting these targets. This inquiry is outside the scope of this thesis, so I did not continue to look into it.

^{lxi} The STYAPs are published by the local education administration department, and are written by a committee of relevant education departments, such as the Teaching and Research Department and experts from East China Normal University. According to education official Huang (EO1), each action plan is based on an in-depth analysis of the former STYAP, especially targeting its problem areas and proposing viable solutions.

^{lxii} For teacher training, the main responsibility falls on experts from East China Normal University, but under the leadership of the SEB, who is in charge of coordinating the overall vision.

^{lxiii} This document was issued by the Ministry of Education with the aim of implementing Xi Jinping's Thought on socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, as well as the spirit of the 19th National Congress. It stipulates 10 guidelines for professional conduct for each level of education, (1) college and university, (2) primary and secondary education, and (3) kindergarten.

^{lxiv} According to my informant Eaten (ES4), there are two types of public servants, one being the *civil service establishment* (公务员编制 *gōngwùyuán biānzhì*), like the public servants of local education bureaus or the SEB, and the other group are the *business establishment* (事业编制 *shìyè biānzhì*), automatically enrolled in the system because of their jobs, like public school and public kindergarten teachers. The term 'establishment' refers to the establishment of production conditions, the promotion of social welfare, and the people's cultural, educational, health and other needs for the state.

^{lxv} This 2018 legislation builds on the 2011 document *Suggestions on Strengthening Party Building Work for Teachers in Public Kindergartens*, whose title is self-explanatory as to its purpose.

^{lxvi} The document explains that teaching staff will be taking part in in-depth educational activities on the theme "My Chinese Dream," like an essay competition, a speech contest, watching inspirational movies, sharing inspirational books, singing inspirational songs and celebrating China's National Day and other major holidays, as well as taking part in classic reading competitions, visiting museums, revolutionary martyrs' memorial halls, etc. (Part 1 Art. 5).

^{lxvii} For example, the 2019-2021 STYAP mentions documents like the Shanghai Kindergarten Quality Evaluation Guide and the Shanghai Kindergarten Grade Evaluation Index System (Main Measures, Art. 11), which are used to assess kindergarten performance and convey an official ranking.

^{lxviii} For example, on the popular website *liuxue86.com* I found a webpage on a Party document entitled Moral Education Work Plan for the Senior Class (K2) for the New Semester (幼儿园大班新学期德育工作计划 *Yòu'eryuán dàbān xīn xuéqī déyù gōngzuò jihuà*), published in February 2018, which contain suggestions about kindergarten activities and well as countless links to lesson plans for all three age-groups, pre-K, K1, and K2. See at: <https://www.liuxue86.com/a/3632293.html> (Accessed on 4. March 2021).

^{lxix} As a consequence of the *Two-child policy*, a total of 218,400 babies were born in 2016, a 7.9% increase from the previous year. According to government data, the figure represents the highest annual number of newborns since 2000 (Shan 2017).

^{lxx} Even though the parent questionnaires were filled-out anonymously, the classroom teachers had access to these surveys before the researcher collected them, bias which I took into consideration in my analysis.

^{lxxi} All three observed public kindergartens designed their curriculum around a 'foundation course' (70-80%) based on Learning Activities designed by the Shanghai Education Publishing House (with the approval and under the supervision of the SEB), as well as their unique component called the "specialist course" (20-30%).

^{lxxii} Public1 is a demonstration kindergarten with both an international and a Chinese stream, so its social media posts are bilingual Mandarin - English, as they cater to an international audience. In my data collection and analysis I looked at both versions.

^{lxxiii} Public2 kindergarten's Principal Ling (PU2K12) often gives interviews to the local media reinforcing the kindergarten's allegiance to Party ideology, as well as a curriculum revolving around traditional Chinese culture and patriotic content. Moreover, her kindergarten encourages related activities meant to bring the kindergarten's 'Chineseness' into the public eye and often invites the local media to cover these events.

^{lxxiv} The merger of the national day and the Mid-Autumn Festival was evident in the kindergarten decorations, as the moon goddess Chang E shared banner space with images of Tian'an Men Square and Mao's portrait, for example.

^{lxxv} Moreover, the 19th National Congress also took place in October, hence these three events were all covered during the September - October WeChat posts and fed off one another. Subsequently, I looked at over a dozen posts to get an informed perspective on how Public2 performed patriotism.

^{lxxvi} Public2 Kindergarten, Official WeChat Posts (Mandarin) on "The celebration of China's National Day," September 2017. The picture caption in Mandarin is 等我长大了。也要和你们一样保卫国家 (Děng wǒ zhǎng dàle. Yě yào hé nǐmen yīyàng bǎowèi guójiā).

^{lxxvii} Public2 Kindergarten, Official WeChat Posts (Mandarin) on "The celebration of China's National Day," September 2017. The picture caption in Mandarin is 手中的五星红旗迎风飘扬; 心中的爱国热情油然而生 (Shǒuzhōng de wǔxīng hóngqí yíngfēng piāoyáng; xīnzhōng de àiguó rèqíng yóurán'ér shēng).

^{lxxviii} Public3 Kindergarten, Official WeChat Posts (Mandarin), "Having the Party flag in your heart," November 2017. Mandarin text: 红色, 彰显热烈与奔放/ 红色, 预示幸福与吉祥。/ 红色, 蕴藏着生命的律动和生机; / 红色, 孕育着人生的理想和希望。(Hóngsè, zhāngxiǎn rèliè yǔ bēnfàng/ hóngsè, yùshì xìngfú yǔ jíxiáng./ Hóngsè, yùncángzhe shēngmìng de lǜdòng hé shēngjī;/ hóngsè, yùnyùzhe rénnshēng de lǐxiǎng hé xīwàng).

^{lxxix} Even though this document was issued one year after the 2017 China's National Day activity analysed in this thesis, according to Eaten (ES4) and Teacher Anna (PR1K20) of Private1 similar regulations were in place well before then, like the 2011 *Suggestions on Strengthening Party Building Work for Teachers in Public Kindergartens* (公立幼儿园中教师加强党建工作的几点建议_Gōnglì yòu'éryuán zhōng jiàoshī jiāqiáng dǎngjiàn gōngzuò de jǐ diǎn jiànyì)

^{lxxx} Teacher Wu (PU1K10) confirmed this fieldtrip took place, but the event was not covered on Public1 kindergarten's official WeChat account.

^{lxxxi} Based on Public2's WeChat posts from March 2018, I gathered that their Lantern Festival activity, celebrated on 2nd March 2018, was a joint event in the main yard, where all the classes watched as professional performers danced the dragon dance. Afterwards, all the classes joined in, each with their own dragon. The classroom I observed throughout the academic year, K2-1, made their own dragon using KFC paper buckets. The children had learnt the dragon dance from their classroom teachers and volunteer parents and performed with the other K2 children in front of their peers and family members, who were also invited to take part in the event. The teachers were not involved in the live performance at all, the coordinators being two volunteer dads, one of them being the head of the dragon and the other playing the drums throughout the performance. This activity showcases that volunteer parents are very involved in activities surrounding the Spring Festival, taking great interest in teaching their children about

^{lxxxii} The children were asked to bring shoe boxes to class, then Teacher LinLin showed them how to cut and glued red and yellow paper scales onto the boxes, thus making the dragon's body. The children had time to work on their respective dragon link box every morning before 9am and used it to form a long dragon during the dance event held on the Lantern Festival (Observation, 20 Mar. 2018).

^{lxxxiii} According to education official Hei (EO3), both elite public primary schools and bilingual Mandarin-English private schools in Shanghai have an unofficial admissions interview where the candidates are tested in Maths, Chinese and English. Given that kindergartens are forbidden from teaching these subjects formally, at the level the schools are testing at, parents are left with no alternative but to send their children to a plethora of extracurricular lessons at increasingly popular training centres.

^{lxxxiv} Out of the 31 children present, only 5 did not have a costume, but the teachers were prepared and gave each of them a witch hat and cape, as well as a pumpkin-shaped trick-or-treat bag.

^{lxxxv} During the 10-minute tour, the children saw a trimmed Christmas tree and a simplistic English Corner Teaching Board in one of the international classrooms, where a paper Christmas tree was surrounded by the scattered key words: Christmas, Merry Christmas, Christmas tree, Santa, gingerbread man, reindeer, present, candy cane, snowman, snowflake, and Happy New Year. Other Christmas-related features in the international classroom were the carols being played in the background, as well as many Christmas arts and crafts decorating the walls. This visual representation was the only educational display in the entire classroom, so it was the only tool Teacher Wu could use to explain what Christmas meant to her class. However, the children were speaking over each other so few paid attention to her explanations.

^{lxxxvi} In both kindergartens an extra class taught by a native English teacher was provided once a week, with a maximum of 5-6 children per class in Private2. The same thing happened with *pinyin* and Maths, both subjects being taught once a week by qualified teachers contracted from outside the kindergarten for the exclusive purpose of preparing the children for primary school.

^{lxxxvii} For example, the 2018 Ten Guidelines for Professional Conduct of Kindergarten Teachers in the New Era, the Kindergarten Party Branch Plan or the Moral Education Work Plan for Kindergartens.

^{lxxxviii} Watching the videos I noticed they are a mixture of original songs and well-known nursery rhymes that are very easy for beginner English learners to sing along with. According to their website, Super Simple started in a classroom in Tokyo, Japan, the brainchild of native English speakers who wanted a better teaching tool for their young pupils.