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Transnational meritocracy? Parent ideologies and private tutoring

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Introduction

The mobility and multi-locality of transnational populations have forced a reassessment of migration theory (Mau, 2010; Vertovec, 2009) and social theory more broadly (Beck, 2007), but are yet to make much of an impact on educational theorising. Yet, with growing access to dual citizenship and temporary residence, more people are moving between national sites as ‘a strategy of survival and betterment’ (Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013, p. 7), often with children’s future opportunities in mind. To this end, ‘transnational families’ sustain extended, multi-sited lifeworlds of ‘networks, activities, patterns of living, and ideologies that span their home and the host society’ (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994, p. 4). Educational ideologies are an important part of the normative load that travels with transnational parents. These ideologies can help frame a careful double game of strategy and risk management in order to ‘keep doors open’ (Doherty, 2018) and thus maintain the child’s option of going ‘back and forth, or to move on to other countries’ (Castles, 2009, p. 53).

As one of the ‘-scapes’ contributing to the complex disjunctural processes of cultural globalisation, Appadurai (1990) included ‘ideo-scape’ to highlight the uneven flow of political ideologies and values into new contexts and the potential for disruptive consequences. He argued that such -scapes are ultimately ‘deeply perspectival constructs’ (p. 7) that inform the imaginary and strategies of individuals that aggregate in diasporas and migration routes. In this chapter, we are interested in the ideologies driving the current escalation in the uptake of private tutoring to enhance children’s school achievement. We explore the implication of ideologies about educational ends and means, educational

competition, and the very nature of childhood itself in the use that transnational families make of tutoring. We consider whether and how the ideologies promoting private tutoring move with transnational populations into new spaces, and to what effect.

Previous research on private tutoring has distinguished between 'high intensity' settings such as Mainland China, Vietnam, Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and India and 'low intensity' settings such as Canada, the US and Australia (Aurini, Davies, & Dierkes, 2013). In the former, private tutoring has been naturalised as a widespread practice that 'shadows' or 'supplements' the work of schools in the pursuit of competitive grades, making it both thinkable and doable for most of the population despite its drain on family resources. In these contexts, good parenting demands it, while children are more or less inured to their double shifts in learning. In contrast, in the latter societies, private tutoring has been practised more as an individualised, ad hoc intervention to remediate or boost poor grades. In the former, private tutoring has become a widespread and unremarkable fact of life; in the latter, it could also be ignored, this time as a minor individualised phenomenon of little significance in the scheme of things. However, escalating transnational flows have burst these discrete national containers to disrupt local ecologies and drawn attention to the burgeoning market for private tutoring and its consequences. Researchers and policy makers around the world have become increasingly alert to private tutoring as a driver and potential source of distortion of schooling outcomes (Bray, 2007; Bray & Lykins, 2012).

Where the ideologies and practices of high intensity settings have entered low intensity settings, there is growing concern that private tutoring becomes a classed practice, further strengthening the hand of the middle class child (for example, Davies & Aurini, 2006). Crucially, it is not only migrant groups but also culturally dominant fractions of the middle classes that have increasingly been using tutoring to hyper-competitive ends in Australia. As Wu and Singh (2004, p.2) observe, 'some Anglo-Australian parents have started to push their children to study hard ... in order to compete in a transnational labour market. Following Chinese-Australian parents, they also send their children to coaching schools ...' Yet, in public media tutoring has been represented as a migrant practice that is disrupting the local meritocratic order, and stoking ethnic resentments. Sriprakash, Proctor and Hu

(2016) have countered that neither the migrant nor the culturally dominant fractions of the middle classes are content to let merit run its course; both intervene in pursuit of the educational outcomes they desire for their children. Migrant parents may make more use of tutoring but the culturally dominant incline nonetheless towards the highly interventionist practices of 'concerted cultivation' of cultural capitals described by Lareau (2011). In recent years, researchers have tended to foreground what Pierre Bourdieu termed the 'condition' of groups (Robbins, 2000). In this case, the professional middle class condition is one of dependence on educational achievement, with increasingly insecure or marginalised positions of fractions of those classes within contemporary social hierarchies (see the collection of articles in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* special issue edited by Watkins, Ho & Butler, 2017). Furthermore, researchers have warned against essentialised culturalist explanations.

A large interview study by Lan (2018) with Han Chinese families in Taiwan and the US of both middle and working class backgrounds is notable for its attention to culture as well as 'condition'. The study documents how transnational educational strategies (including tutoring and summer camps) are refracted by both class and race in their marketing and consumption. Lan's 'transnational relational analysis' (p.4) carefully dissects the intersections between ethnicity, class position, gender and generation in the work of social reproduction undertaken by the 'global families' in her study to address both their hopes and their fears in what she terms 'the global arms race in education' (p.50). Lan concludes that the success of some in using 'global security strategies' (p.12) to navigate their children into advantageous futures contributes to the lack of success for others at home and abroad. In this view, transnational parents with abundant resources to invest in their children's education, tend to scale up their perceptions of globalized risk, and then mobilise their resources to secure their children's future, modifying local norms both 'here' and 'there' as they do so. Effectively, this magnifies the insecurity of the disadvantaged.

Lan's (2018) work develops in dialogue with Lareau's (2011) elaboration of Bourdieu's theorisation of capitals in terms of classed parenting ideologies. However, Lan ultimately critiques those theories for their methodological nationalism, and failure to grapple with the transnational social field:

parents creatively mix and match cultural scripts, between the global and the local and between the home and host countries to make sense of their particular class experience and to adapt to the constraining opportunity structure. (p. 172)

Private tutoring, being a parent-oriented market operating above and beyond formal schooling, is a particularly fertile phenomenon in which to explore parents' unmediated educational ideologies. In this chapter we bring these problematics to bear on the use of tutoring by transnational families in Australia. Some of the families are migrants into Australia and others are expatriates returned from settings in which tutoring is of higher intensity than has been typical in Australia. We ask how these transnationally mobile parents (i) explain the purchase of private tutoring; and (ii) invoke ideologies of meritocratic competition in doing so. The chapter proceeds in three sections. In the first we briefly introduce the empirical study. In the second section we report detailed analyses of three interviews selected to illustrate key ideological positions taken by the transnational families within the data set. We conclude with a discussion of how parents' choices around private tutoring are deeply ideological and indicative of a parentocratic, rather than meritocratic, logic that plays out within familial class conditions.

The empirical study

The data set consists of 35 interviews with parents of children aged approximately 9½ to 10½ years who were in Year 5 in 2017 in Queensland, Australia. This year is the penultimate year of primary school in which all Australian students take national benchmark tests in literacy and numeracy¹, and some take, or prepare for, scholarship examinations for prestigious schools. Participants were recruited through advertising in schools and through parent and community Facebook groups. Demographic data (e.g., income, family residential history, home languages) were recorded in a written survey at the beginning of the interview. The interview itself was semi-structured and audio-recorded, with questions about significant abilities or disabilities of the focal child, educational biography, use of tutoring and other forms of supplementary education, and observations on the use of supplementary education by others.

¹ The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) assesses all students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9.

Analysis of the demographic data showed that (1) weekly household income ranged from \$500-649 to \$8000+^{2,3}; (2) English was not the only language of the home for 7 families; and (3) children in 9 families had diagnosed or supposed learning disabilities and difficulties. Families that did not speak English at home had some of the highest incomes⁴. The families of children with diagnosed or supposed learning disabilities and difficulties were spread more widely across the income range but clustered at the lower income end and were absent at the higher income end⁵.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim with pseudonyms replacing names of people, places or organisations. The analytic questions asked of the data were: What ideological views do the participants express about educational ends and means, educational competition, and the nature of childhood? Here we present detailed profiles and analyses of interviews with three families in the sample who reported transnational routes. Two of the families were returned Australian expatriates – one from the UK; and one from a South-East Asian nation⁶ where their child had attended a British international school with many UK, and some Australian and wealthy local children amongst others. The third family had migrated from China. The three interviews illustrate some of the key ideological strands identified across the data set.

Family 1: Cultural nostalgia in new conditions of governing

Carla belonged to the managerial middle class. Her and her husband's highest level of education was university entrance. Carla's husband was now a telecommunications company manager supporting their family of three children with a household income above the national average. The family had relocated for the husband's work from Australia to a South-East Asian nation for three years before returning to Australia in 2017. Her son, Noah, began school in Australia then moved during Year 2 to a high-fee international school

² At the time of writing, AU\$ 500 = GBP 273, US\$ 354 or EUR 313.

³ In the 2016 census, national median weekly household income was \$1567.

http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/036

⁴ Six of these seven families disclosed their incomes; all were above \$4000.

⁵ Such families reported the two lowest incomes (\$500-649, \$650-799) and none had incomes above \$3000-\$3499.

⁶ We have blurred non-essential details here to reduce identifiability.

running the International Baccalaureate curriculum. Noah's academic results had begun to decline prior to the move to South-East Asia and worsened during the time there. When the family returned to Australia, Noah began in Year 5. Carla was mostly concerned that he achieved below the Year 5 NAPLAN benchmark in literacy and had considered using remedial tutoring but at the time of interview had not yet done so. This link between poor NAPLAN results and the use of tutoring recurred in our data set. This association resonates with historically established cultural ideologies about the place of tutoring in Australian society, that is, that tutoring is a remedial option for families. Invoking the US accountability regimen, No Child Left Behind, anthropological research on education desire in China has argued that this type of dynamic shows how the West is developing forms of governance through audit akin to those already well established in China (Kipnis, 2011).

Carla believed that Noah's education was important and that school success was vital to keeping his future options open. However, Carla's transnational experiences gave her a clear sense of her own ideological boundaries around how she was prepared to support Noah throughout his school life. She was uncomfortable with the explicit global schooling agenda she observed while in the expatriate setting. In particular, she rejected its corporate feel, with its emphasis on developing students' global citizenship through collaboration, creativity, international sporting competition and field trips overseas. Carla observed that other expatriates and locals were comfortably engaged in the corporate dynamic but she sought to separate herself from such imperatives. Carla expressed far more comfort with the Australian education the family had returned to, perhaps insofar as her more relaxed attitude was more common in Australia than in the South-East Asian nation where both other expatriates and local elites pursued a more intensive approach. Carla's comparison between her and her peers' parenting practices illustrates the relational, referential and emotional work in parents' transnational education strategies. Lan (2018) suggests that it is common for immigrant parents to 'use class peers back home as their transnational reference groups as they arrange children's education, care, and discipline'. Here we see a similar dynamic amongst expatriates.

According to Carla, the bulk of academic teaching was the responsibility of the school and she would work at home to support the school's work as such. She maintained regular

communication with Noah's teachers and pushed to have his learning weaknesses addressed. When she felt that a learning difficulty was not being addressed she would approach the teacher: 'I'll go and I'll hound, I'll check, I'll ask, and then at home I'll support, you know? What can we read?' Carla observed the prevalence of other parents sending their children to tutoring after school; however, she felt this was too much pressure and structure for children. In other words, such practice did not accord with her version of childhood. Instead of following in the footsteps of her peers, she said, 'I won't inflict that on him. Maybe we'll just do some more reading at home.' High academic achievement and intense competition were not a priority for Carla and she was comfortable with Noah's average achievement in literacy. She was content with doing enough to get by and had planned to address more substantive issues when the family returned to Australia:

If he's put back a year, I'm alright with that, I do not care. There were lots of other [expatriates] thinking "well my child can't go back" whereas I'm like I don't care so long as the end result when we come home is that if there's a few little gaps that need to be filled, that's okay.

Carla seemed to distinguish her values and choices from those of other expatriate parents. She said that she knew she wanted to return to Australia to raise her children, whereas many other parents were perpetually mobile, moving from place to place: 'I guess a lot of the parents that were there, this was, you know, like their first posting and they knew they were moving on. So their thinking is not like my thinking.' By her report, these other families were more comfortable with the intensive education and tutoring strategy. By Carla's description of her expatriate peers, they were part of the global middle class (GMC) – 'managers and professionals and their families who move around the global in the employ of multi-national corporations' (Ball & Nikita, 2014, p. 85). For the GMC, mobility permeates their lives and ensuing strategies; 'the global city is the habitat of the GMC, a site of identity-making, life-style, familial decision-making and social reproduction' (p.85). While Carla mixed with the GMC, her underpinning ideologies about education did not align with those characteristic of the GMC and this may offer some sociological understanding of why she felt so unconnected to her peers during her time abroad.

Unstructured family time was important to Carla but she noticed that the family time of the other expatriates she mixed with was heavily structured: 'I would much rather [the children] splatter paint over outside and play in the mud as toddlers, than go to ... everything was very organised, "You do this, and it's in this place."' Her valuing of unstructured time factored in her resistance to using private tutoring even back in Australia: 'I think the kids have done enough hours in the classroom.' Private tutoring was considered a last resort for Noah if his results continued to decline in the months after our interview. She said that she would then seek a one-to-one tutor who could attend to Noah on a more personal level.

This case documents what might be considered (1) 'established' and dominant Australian ideologies about childhood as relatively unstructured, (2) schooling as part of life, not the driving focus, and (3) the appropriate use of tutoring for remedial purposes. We see this through the contrast between what the mother expressed comfort with and what she reported feeling uncomfortable about. Although generated in an interview with a transnational family, such views were common across the local families in our data set. We turn now to a family that was reluctant to use tutoring but was deeply invested in educational competition and high achieving professional futures.

Family 2: Cultural nostalgia in hyper-competitive worlds

Kate was a mother in an upper middle class, traditional professional family. She was a nurse with a Master's degree and her husband was a general medical practitioner. Together they earned an income that put the family in the highest band on our written survey. The family had two primary school-aged children. The family had lived in England for about a decade before returning to Australia in 2013. Timothy, Kate's Year 5 son, attended a national tutoring franchise when his English results dropped below outstanding – from an A to a B.

Kate said that the family, including her children's grandparents, valued academia. She explained that their middle class position had been won through outstanding academic achievement on the part of earlier generations. In these conditions, a university education was equally expected of Kate's children. To this end, she outlined her conscious efforts to monitor and intervene in Timothy's education. At home, Kate ensured that he was well-prepared for classwork and assessments, and coupled this effort with an expectation that at

school he would be committed, well-behaved and hard-working. Indeed, this was one of the reasons she gave for why she was pleased that there were well disciplined and high-achieving Asian children amongst his peers at school. Expectations in the home were high: ‘we give them ample time to practice their weekly spelling words so I don’t expect them on Friday to come home with a spelling wrong – 19 out of 20 is not acceptable.’ Kate also served as a teacher in the home to supplement content she felt was missing in the school’s provision of education. For example, when the family returned to Australia, Kate was concerned that Timothy’s mathematics abilities had advanced beyond the year level they would be entering locally. She responded by accessing a textbook based on the Australian curriculum and identified the level at which she thought Timothy was working. After school each day he completed extra maths at the more advanced UK level: ‘we do make sure they’re working at their level at home rather than where their level at school is. Because it’s very different.’ Kate was not the only interviewee to indicate that she used supplementary education of one or another type in this way. These types of interventionist practices within the family are well-documented amongst middle-class parents (see for example, Lareau, 2011). In addition to these efforts, Kate outsourced when she felt she needed more expertise —a practice described as ‘externalisation’ in research on tutoring among high income families in France (Collas, 2013).

Kate sent Timothy to a national tutoring franchise when he received a B for a task in his subject English work, where he had usually been awarded As. Kate attributed the decline to a combination of laziness (‘it takes a bit more effort to write a few extra sentences’), weak confidence (‘he’s got it in his head he can’t do it or he’s not good at it’) and boredom (‘I think he just gets a bit bored with it and stops’). It should be noted that none of these diagnoses doubted Timothy’s innate ability. By her report, Kate intervened without hesitation: ‘It was halfway through Year 3. We went “okay, let’s go and sort this out for you.”’

Kate’s underpinning belief in the importance of achieving (and maintaining) the top academic credentials naturalised and legitimated her choices to monitor, intervene and supplement her children’s education. What we describe here is indicative of a ‘concerted cultivation’ approach to parenting. Lareau (2002) coined this term to describe the ways that

middle-class parents tend to make 'a deliberate and sustained effort to stimulate children's development and to cultivate their cognitive and social skills' (Lareau, 2002, p.773). Kate's provision of a private tutor was one very tangible example of the substantial personal and economic resources she devoted to the cultivation and optimisation of Timothy's abilities. In line with Lan's (2018) critique of concerted cultivation's methodological nationalism, we can see beyond Kate's middle-class identity to explain her concerted efforts as informed by transnational scripts and points of reference from Kate's previous experiences. In the remaining analysis we tease out traces of the UK (global) and Australian (local) ideologies that underpinned her strategy.

While academic excellence was important to Kate, her experiences in the UK placed a clear boundary around the extent of competitive means she was willing to use to achieve this goal. She believed that the UK education system was hyper-competitive and this was a significant reason why they chose to return to Australia:

part of the reason we left the UK was to leave the model of achieving kids having tutoring to achieve more. I didn't want to be engaged in the pressure for everyone to have a tutor. If we were there, we'd have a tutor, and I want them out of that pressure.

As Kate had observed, tutoring has become more prevalent in the UK than in Australia. Analyses of PISA 2015 data (Jerrim, 2017) found that a smaller percentage of Australian students received one-to-one tutoring in science (9%) and mathematics (16%) than in England (18%, 21% respectively). Notwithstanding her reservations about tutoring in the UK, Kate did feel that in Australia, other parents expected too little of their children: 'we can expect so much more from them ... But I think that expectation genuinely isn't there on white middle class kids for fear of tipping them over the edge.' This is a view that recurs in the data set; it was expressed in interviews with migrant, returned expatriate and managerial middle class families. Kate seemed to reconcile her observations of polar versions of parenting by valuing 'balance' in her children's lives and to this end, facilitated her children to play sport and a musical instrument outside of school.

Kate believed that there should be a clear demarcation between home and school: 'You work hard at school so you can come home and play. When you walk through the door that is the end of learning.' In thinking about future plans to use private tutoring, she said that she would consider paying for a homework tutor, or choosing a private school with built-in homework help so that 'home is home.' In this way, Kate valued a childhood that maintained some innocence and partial protection from the competitive demands of the education system. However, the active structuring of Timothy's leisure time with extra-curricular activities continued concerted efforts to develop abilities and sponsor accomplishments.

Vincent and Ball (2007) argue that parents' choice to enrol children in enrichment activities, such as sports and music lessons, is a key reproductive strategy: 'one response to the anxiety and sense of responsibility experienced by middle-class parents as they attempt to "make up" a middle-class child in a social context where reproduction appears uncertain' (p.1061). Jerrim's (2017) analyses of PISA 2015 data found that students from affluent families in Australia, England and China received more extra instruction than their poorer peers, although the difference was more marked in England and Australia than in China (see also Zhou & Wang, 2016). Detailed analysis of the English data showed that advantaged children received more concerted cultivation in music, sport and languages, while their disadvantaged peers received more instruction in core academic subjects.

We suggest, then, that the skills and talents engendered by enrichment activities provide an additional positional advantage that could contribute to Timothy's attainment of excellence. Kate seemed to reconcile her assessment of UK childhood as too demanding and of Australian childhood that sets the bar too low by allocating time for Timothy away from academic learning while still engaged in 'forms [of leisure] considered developmentally healthy and productive' (Prout, 2005, p.33).

Kate's choice to forego more intense academic competition in favour of 'balance' caused her a degree of uncertainty and tension. She said that when she compared her situation to her UK peers' experiences, 'it's always in the back of my mind - are we doing the best for our kids? Should we be investing in verbal reasoning training? You know, all that stuff.' Like

Carla, Kate's questioning and second-guessing suggests that she used her transnational peers as reference points for her educational decisions. While Carla distinguished her own choices from those of her expatriate peers, Kate's example shows that it is equally possible that returned parents continue to use their expatriate contexts to inform their choices.

Family 3: Cultural becoming through educational hyper-competitiveness

Wenyong was the mother in a high income professional family that had migrated to Australia from Mainland China. At the time of the interview, she was purchasing English and mathematics tutoring for her daughter, Meihua. During the school holidays, Wenyong had provided Meihua with ICAS⁷ and NAPLAN preparation materials, and academic extension books for self-study. She was also teaching Meihua Chinese, something that Meihua described as 'home-schooling'. Wenyong's immediate goal was to secure the best educational opportunities for Meihua through a high fee private school or a selective public school—options favoured differently by traditional and managerial fractions of the Australian middle class (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009; Windle, 2015). At the time of the interview, Meihua was preparing for the private school scholarship test and had already taken a selective public school entrance test. In the long term, Wenyong hoped that Meihua would become a doctor or research scientist, both professional occupations that are accessible through exceptional academic achievement. This put Meihua in direct competition with children like Kate's son, Timothy. It is the intensity of this notionally meritocratic competition within the middle class—and the attendant use of tutoring—that is the object of much of the tension in public discussion of tutoring in Australia.

China is the pertinent transnational reference point (Lan, 2018) in Wenyong's thinking. Discussing the study loads imposed on Chinese children in Australia, Wenyong said that 'it's hard when some children have to do it and some don't' and that she was 'happy' that Meihua was 'good and cheerful' about it. None the less, she said that she did invoke life in China to spur Meihua on: 'I tell her ... the Chinese students in China ... they have to study hard ... they have to do homework until 10 o'clock.' Wenyong was resigned to academic competition as a feature of childhood: 'I know the children [in China] they don't like it but

⁷ ICAS = International Competitions and Schools Assessments. These tests are developed by the University of New South Wales for the purpose of identifying high potential students.

they've got no choice at all. The competition is very hard'. Wenying perceived that Meihua was handicapped in the local educational competition because the language of instruction was not that of her home. Furthermore, she thought that the homework provided by the school was insufficient. During our interview in a suburban library on a Friday evening, Wenying pointed out some white Australian children and observed, 'you know what [the] time [is] now, it's 5 o'clock ... and they are playing and they do something what they like' whereas 'Chinese students, they have to do homework at this time and even in holidays.'

Wenying's attitudes towards educational competition and discipline in childhood are ubiquitous in China. Zhao, Selman and Luke (2018) highlight both the underpinning cultural dimensions and the material conditions of existence that sustain such ideology. While the latter accounts for contemporary social policy settings and access to educational opportunities, the former attends to cultural practices embodied by Han Chinese over many generations and the ideological assumptions that underpin these. One key assumption is that education is the only means to the good life, and that it is the filial duty of children to secure that life for the family. Another is that children are malleable products of parental effort to ensure that their children make the most of themselves.

By her account, Wenying did not have the linguistic capabilities to teach Meihua herself, so she purchased English tutoring even though she was underwhelmed by the product: 'I don't think that ... the program is very good'. Given the pricing strategy, it was most cost-efficient for Wenying to purchase a bundle of tutoring that included mathematics as well. Wenying said that she had seen the advertisements for the tutoring supplier in 'the Chinese news net' and had 'followed' relatives who had emigrated before her and 'had some experience (of) what to do in the country'. This latter point is important. Tutoring was not simply an established cultural practice that the family had carried with them to Australia. Rather, private tutoring, in particular test coaching, is recognised as a common tactic in Australia for gaining private school scholarships and entry into selective public schools – and not only for migrants (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009; Windle, 2015). In other words, tutoring was a practice that Han Chinese migrants were taking up in the opportunity structures of Australia, although it was underpinned by cultural assumptions about education, competition, parenting and childhood that had their transnational reference point in China.

Tellingly, Wenying explained that parents in China have now turned to tutoring, too. When on holidays in China, she found it 'very, very strange' that even her teacher sister was purchasing tutoring. By her report, in China now children 'go to tutorial lessons... outside school' whereas when she went through a key-point school⁸ 'the teachers give me lots and lots of you know material... I didn't need to do any extra tutorial'. Tutoring has indeed flourished in China recently. After years of more egalitarian educational successes, competition was deliberately ramped up from the 1980s as China opened itself to the world. By the 2000s, reforms were brought in to lessen the stress of the ferocious competition that ensued, but these were widely circumvented through tutoring (Zhao, Selman & Haste, 2015). Our point here is that tutoring may be a high intensity practice in China, evident among Chinese migrants in Australia, and resonant with culturally common assumptions in both settings, but the practice is not simply carried from one to another society. Rather the practice is re-oriented to the educational opportunities on offer in the new setting and the new challenges such as language learning. Moreover, as the interviews with Carla and Kate showed, the decision to purchase tutoring in Australia is informed by a variety of reference communities both local and transnational —then all these ideological messages are filtered through the particularities of families' material conditions.

Discussion

The analyses presented in this paper addressed two research questions: (i) how do transnationally mobile parents view the purchase of private tutoring; and (ii) how are ideologies of meritocratic competition and childhood invoked? We look at these layers in turn.

In our data, parents' approach to educational means, including the choice to (not) use private tutoring, differed with familial class condition and ideologies of education. Carla's family is part of the national/global managerial middle class that has been favoured by contemporary social, economic and political conditions. In this case, tutoring was only to be used remedially and as a last resort within a school field in which governance is, at least

⁸ A key-point school was an academically elite school endowed with resources to stimulate China's modernization.

partially, now by audit. Nostalgic Australian cultural ideologies about childhood, education and parenting remained in play even across transnational space. In contrast, Kate was part of the more traditional professional middle class, and Wenying was seeking entry into that class for her daughter. The conditions of these class positions are more tenuous, reliant on educational achievement to reproduce or achieve the professional status. It is therefore not surprising that parents' education strategies would, where possible, include the enlistment of private tutoring to support and cultivate their children's potential for academic achievement and success. In these conditions, ideologies of childhood, education and parenting in China offered a useful reference point for Wenying. In contrast, Kate's views were more conflicted. While she held a certain nostalgic model of Australian childhood, the ideological influences of the UK, where education is apparently more competitive, became a reference point for her. This points, perhaps, to the eclipse of the socio-political ideology of intra-national meritocracy for at least some in the Australian middle classes.

What we have described in our analyses is more indicative of the logic of 'parentocracy'. This concept was originally created to capture the socio-political ideology by which the neoliberal education policies imposed in Britain, America and New Zealand in the 1980s were legitimated. Under parentocratic ideology, educational goods are properly distributed according to parental means and wishes, not according to the ability and effort or merit of students (Brown, 1990). Since then, increasingly interventionist practices of parenting, including that described as concerted cultivation by Lareau, have been construed as 'parentocratic' (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2016). This concept has proved useful in studies of private tutoring around the world, for instance, in Australia (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Sriprakash et al., 2016), Greece (Katartzi, 2017), Canada (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2016), France, Japan and Brazil (Nogueira, 2009), and Singapore (C. Tan, 2017; J. Tan, 2018).

While in public discourse, private tutoring is often reported as a disruption to Australia's supposedly meritocratic order, we argue that private tutoring, as a market independent of formal school systems, operates on a parentocratic logic in which parents' ideologies and ideological investments are not mediated by the 'objective' expertise of educational professionals. Ideologies about educational ends and means, educational competition, and

the nature of childhood will be variously shaped in and across home and host countries, invoked as cultural resources at home and abroad, and implicated in transnational families' educational strategies. These ideologies have free rein and will construct different lived curricula in the space between school and home for differently conditioned childhoods.

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