Middle-class identity formation and children's use of public space in Shenzhen, China

Universiteit van Amsterdam

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Master Thesis Human Geography

Colophon

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Date
August 16, 2013

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"It changed a lot here. You know, where we are sitting right now, there used to be the sea. Gradually, the sea was made into land and a lot of tall buildings were built, and it became a city. Actually, everything changed a lot. Also, I used to be really poor, but now we have an amazing house and we have our own car. Life changed a lot".

(mother of two, living in
a luxurious high-rise complex)
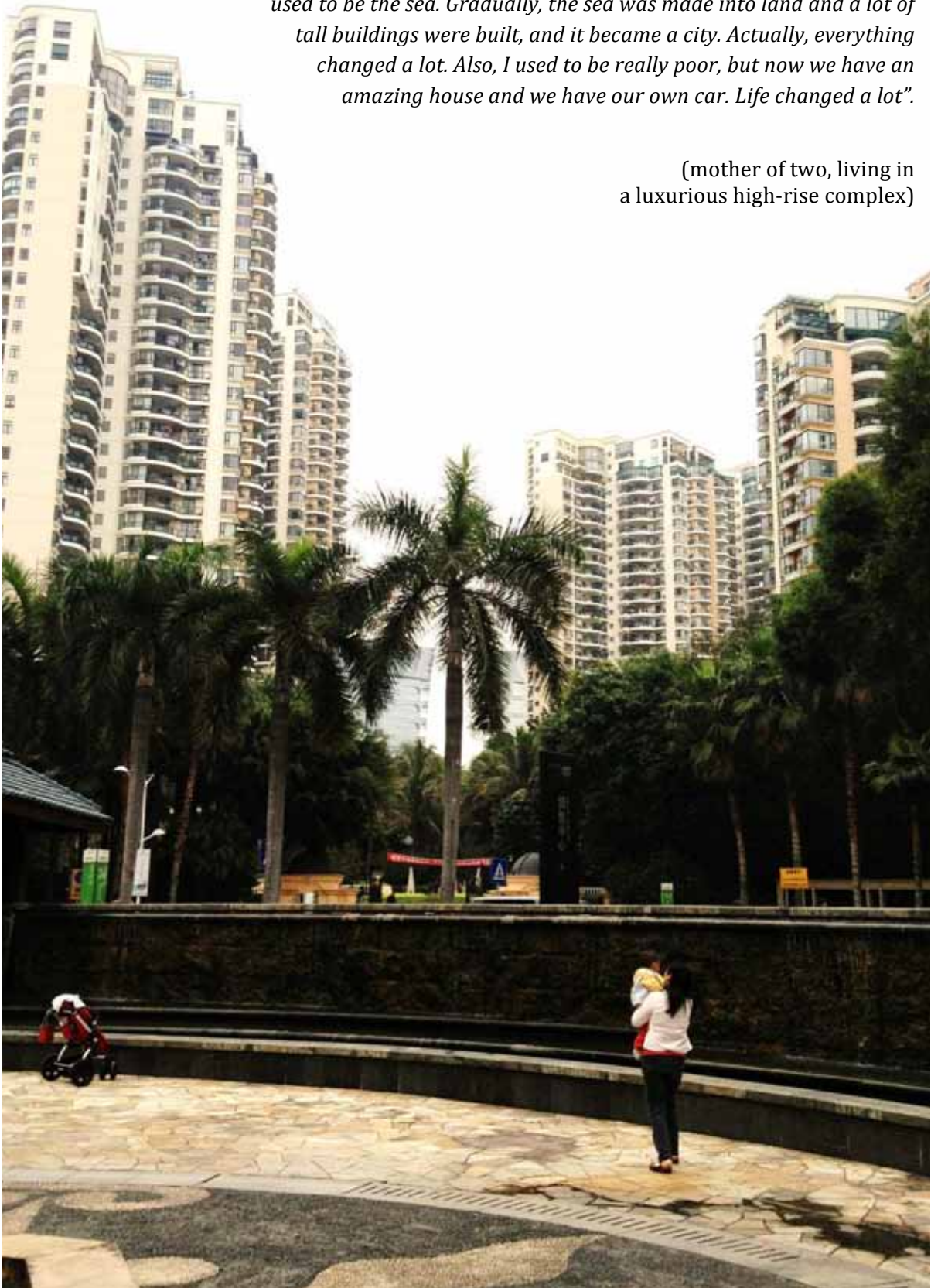
Foreword

Conducting research in Shenzhen and writing this thesis has been the largest project I have worked on during my university education and has also been the one to which I have devoted the most time and energy. It has truly been one of the most valuable experiences in my time as a student. I feel very lucky to be presented with the opportunity to participate in the collaboration project between the International New Town Institute and the University of Amsterdam. At last, I was able to combine both my academic skills and interests and personal passion for travelling and discovering foreign cultures all in one challenging and exciting endeavour. It has been the best conclusion to my university education I could have wished for.

My fieldwork and writing my thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and supervision of Arnold Reijndorp, whom I'd like to thank sincerely for his support, sharing his knowledge and assisting me as struggled, and also thrived, in doing my research. I would also like to thank Chingwen Yang for all her refreshing insights. Although Shenzhen is maybe not an authentic Chinese destination and is not exceptionally beautiful or exciting, this new city has definitely stolen a small bit of my heart. This is to a large part due to all the wonderful and remarkable people I was lucky to meet throughout my fieldwork. Without the help of the many student volunteers whose assistance and knowledge I value greatly, I would have achieved very few of my plans and goals. I will remember all of the many friendly and welcoming families that I met throughout time in Shenzhen; I will never forget the many stories (and often meals) they shared with me. I would like to thank Urbanus, who offered us a very comfortable and stimulating working environment. Thank you INTI, for arranging our accommodation and work place and of course all the contacts and workshops. It has been such a valuable experience being able to participate in this project and work with your institution.

Last, but not least, I want to thank all my friends for being so patient with me when I was stressed and my classmates for their companionship and feedback. My Shenzhen experience would not have been the same without our little group of geographers- and planners-to-be, I feel very lucky to have shared this experience with you. And thank you of course, Lysanne, for being my study-buddy. I am happy we were able to make so many memories during our fieldwork together!

Abstract

Unprecedented economic development in China results in the emergence of a new urban middle class in Shenzhen and many of China's other immense cities. The consequences for Chinese society will be noticeable in how this new middle class views themselves and live their lives. Middle-class parents in Shenzhen define their middle-class identity through different parental practices and through personal narrative involving symbolic boundaries between themselves and other types of parents, including their own. Parents want their children to be independent and happy individuals, which are values that often conflict with expectations of achievement. Children participate in many different activities after school and are encouraged to perform well in school. The physical structure and availability of public places suitable for children limits and determines children's activities, behaviour and interactions. Children of middle-class parents rarely use public space alone and their activities and interactions are to a large extent determined by their parents. As social networks are often very new or constantly shifting and social interactions in public places are rare or superficial, public space in Shenzhen is generally not a place is where individuals can express their identity through social interactions with others or by forming place-based networks. Children use public space in a family context and their parents pay little attention to the behaviour of others or to the social interactions of their children with other children. The activities children participate in are more relevant in their parents identity formation as they reflect their goals and aspirations. These activities are, however, not determined by place. Public space and the way children use it, therefore, does not appear to be the most relevant factor in the formation of parent's middle-class identity.

Contents

Introduction

Rapid economic growth as observed in China over recent years is resulting in opportunities and a standard of living previously unknown to large parts of its population, particularly in China's newly expanding urban areas such as Shenzhen. Liberalisation policies were introduced in the late 1970s by the then new party leader Den Xiaoping, who pursued a new economic model focusing on the creation of Special Economic Zones. These zones were specifically selected along the coast, where economic activity would be organized along principles in alliance with a market economy, such as foreign trade and market forces. Guangdong Province developed into 'the factory of the world' during the 1990s and Shenzhen, the oldest of all Special Economic zones, rapidly developed from a small fisherman's village into one of China's new megacities, with currently a population of around 13 million (Hulshof and Roggeveen, 2011; O'Donnell, 2001).

Amidst this unprecedented economic development a new urban middle class arises. The consequences for Chinese society will be noticeable in how this new middle class views themselves and lives their live, as "more people will aspire to join it and embrace what are perceived to be modern values and behaviours" (Elfick, 2011, p. 192). Consequently, an expanding middle-class with increasing affluence will significantly impact consumption patterns and define urban lifestyles in China's immense cities such as Shenzhen. A former fisherman's village with up to 30 years ago a population of 30.000, Shenzhen has no existing urban class system and associated hierarchies and identities to which can be referred by new inhabitants. Middle-class citizens of this new city will have to define and construct a new identity as part of an immense, diverse and rapidly changing population through specific behaviour, choices and consumption patterns.

Shenzhen, a recently emerged urban environment characterized by unbridled construction and real estate development, is for a large part made up of high-rise residential structures. These structures have a significant impact on how public space is used, both by adults and children. Children's experiences in public space in Shenzhen in particular are shaped by their residential environment because of the barriers that high-rise projects pose to access and use of public places. Playgrounds and other facilities can offer a compensation for "the daily restrictions that children growing up in an urban environment encounter" (Karsten, 2003, p. 457).

Construction site where in the near future a new addition to Shenzhen's endless number a high-rise gated complex will be built. Construction sites like these are seen all over Shenzhen.

Public space can be an important location in expressing and shaping one's identity, as citizens from different groups in society use it to express their attitudes and use it for their own purposes. People

interact with both strangers and acquaintances which helps them to understand their position in the social world. Shenzhen has many large-scale public facilities such as parks, playgrounds and squares which are widely used. The most popular public places are malls and large-scale public facilities including playgrounds, parks and squares and children's centres. The large scale of Shenzhen and its public places mean that children and parents rarely meet or interact with acquaintances or strangers. The role of public space in expressing and shaping one's identity in Shenzhen remains an issue to be discussed.

Middle-class parents invest heavily in their children's upbringing and are conscious of the influence of their choices and decisions on their child's well-being, development and success. Chinese parents in particular are very conscious and mindful of the investments they make in their children's growth and education (French, 2006; Fong, 2004; Zhang, 2010). The governments renowned one-child policy furthermore means that families often consist of only one child, allowing parents to give their one child their undivided attention.

This thesis is based on a study about the relationship between the ways in which children from middle-class families in high-rise neighbourhoods in Shenzhen use public space and how their parents shape and express their middle-class identity. Shenzhen's recent development, continuing expansion and changing population make the city an ideal site to explore the new urban middle classes. High-rise neighbourhoods and gated communities are hugely popular and continue to be constructed at a hurried pace on the ever expanding edges of the city. They offer many research opportunities about high-rise living in new towns and urban areas. The study involves and exploration of the ways in which children in high-rise communities use public space such as playgrounds, parks, malls and squares in the rapidly expanding and transforming urban environment of Shenzhen, China. As parents are actively involved in their children's schooling and activities, the way in which children use public space is then connected to the views, ideals and goals of their parents regarding their upbringing. This will be linked to the way in which their parents shape, express and pursue their middle-class identity. The focus of this research is on parents' middle-class identity formation within the context of the family.

Following the theoretical framework and methodology chapter, 4 chapters will answer the research questions by presenting the empirical findings. Chapter 3 involves the organization of children's daily lives and describes the different aspects of their busy schedules. Chapter 4 is included to give insight in to children's use of public space. This will be done by describing high-rise complexes, different locations and activities and interactions in public space. Parental values and practices as found amongst Shenzhen parents are presented in Chapter 5, which includes findings related to hopes and expectations, values and involvement. This chapter furthermore includes a theme present in many accounts, namely that of contrasts between different generations. The last empirical chapter address parent's middle-class identity formation by looking into social distinction, the relationship to 'the other' and goals and aspirations. The last part of this chapter is devoted to symbolic boundary drawing, which is predominantly in comparisons between different parenting styles. The research and different findings are summarized, analyzed and reflected upon in the conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

1.1 Emerging Chinese middle-class

Along with rapid urbanization following economic liberalization in megacities like Shenzhen, a new Chinese urban middle middle-class emerged and developed specific needs and demands with respect to housing, education, leisure and consumption (Zhang, 2010; Li, 2010; Farrel et al, 2006). This rapidly expanding Chinese middle-class is increasingly influential and of economic importance as it has ever more money to spend. The expansion of this new urban middle-class is an on-going development that is becoming more and more of a relevant discussion topic as it is predicted that "in the coming century, China will change from a rural into an urban society" (Hulshof and Roggeveen, 2011, p. 21). This process will impact the lives of many as differences between different generations in terms of employment, education, opportunities and socio-economic status continue to grow (Hulshof and Roggeveen, 2011; Farrell et al, 2006; Li, 2010; Zhang, 2010).

1.2 Middle class – Economic Classification and Social Designation

The term 'middle class' is rather broad and somewhat ambiguous concept. It derives from the notion of the existence of a social group in the middle of two others: lower than the upper class, but higher than the lower class. This suggests that the definition of the term 'middle class' is highly subjective to national, cultural and economic contexts and, indeed, different sources offer different definitions of 'middle class'. For example, Kharas and Gertz (in Li, 2010) encounter the same problem and argue that "the middle class is as much a social designation as an economic classification" (p. 34).

An economic classification based on income and consumption levels involves a definition in either absolute terms or relative terms. Absolute terms can involve measurements of annual incomes and purchasing power parity; relative terms involve percentiles of consumption distribution and income level as compared to median per capita income (p. 34). Applying an absolute definition, meaning that the middle class is defined as having daily expenditures of between $10 and $100 dollar per person in terms of purchasing power parity (p. 34), China's current middle class consists of 157 million people. This number which will continue to increase rapidly in the near future (p. 41).

Seeing that the newly emerging and dynamic class structure of urban China is dependent on more than economic development alone, an economic classification of the new Chinese middle class is not sufficient. The new Chinese middle class should be understood in a changing social context and therefore should additionally be explained as a social designation. Apart from having higher levels of income, this definition entails education level and occupational prestige, which differs from the upper class or working class (Chunling, 2010, p. 135 in Li, 2010). Elfick (2011) defines 'middle class' as "the new class of people that has emerged in China with medium incomes, distinct from the two traditional classes of workers and farmers" (p. 189). This is still rather broad definition and requires further categorization, such as Chunlings's (2010) definition. Applying Goldthorpe's definition of the middle-classes, Chungling describes

the composition of China's middle class and distinguishes between four subclasses that differ in both economic conditions and socio-political characteristics. The four subclasses that compose China's middle class are, then; private entrepreneurs or the capitalist class; professionals, managers, and government officials, or the new middle class; small employers, small business owners, and the self-employed, or the old middle class; and last, low-wage white collar and other workers (p. 143). The institutional segmentation between the public and private sectors creates an additional division between the second group, the new middle class, as they differ in terms of social, economic and political characteristics.

1.3 Middle-class identity formation

Li Zhang (2010) offers an ethnographic account of how "middle-class subjects and a middle-class cultural milieu are cultivated" within high-rise neighbourhoods and compounds (p. 106). According to Zhang, "the so-called new middle class is a complex and unstable social formation consisting of people with diverse occupations and social backgrounds" and what connects them is "a similar orientation in lifestyles expressed in homeownership, consumerism and economic liberalism" (p.5). This reflects a shift away from Maoist socialism in terms of urban Chinese lifestyles and the way urban Chinese perceive their environment, their lives and themselves (p. 1). Members of the new urban middle class in China seek social distinction and actively express and shape their identity through residential location and housing choice, of which high-rise living in newly constructed compounds is an example (Li, 2010; Zhang, 2010). Apart from housing choices, the formation of middle-class identity of urban residents is reflected in other activities and behaviour. Following years of homogenous lifestyles according to Chinese socialists principles, those who have the resources now explore the boundaries and possibilities that a middle-class lifestyle and status has to offer (Li, 2010; Zhang, 2010). This is a process that involves "the cultivation of new lifestyles, mentalities, dispositions, and aspirations" (p. 14), with more emphasis on cultural taste (p. 79) an active search for status recognition (p. 107).

Consumption and distinction

What it means to be middle class, with respect to those outside of the middle-class, is often reflected in consumption patterns, particularly in modern Chinese society (Elfick, 2011; Li, 2010; Zhang, 2010); and, according to Elfick (2011), even more so in Shenzhen (p. 198). Elfick observed three significant developments in Chinese society, being that "the egalitarian social structure of socialist China has crumbled under the development of a market economy; social mobility has become an indisputable fact, and people are jockeying for position in the social order" (p. 188). Elfick adds that particularly in Shenzhen, there is a strong longing for class-based hierarchy and order. Class is reflected in and expressed through taste and consumption and preference for particular goods and services might act as a means of creating and displaying distinction, thereby establishing the relationship to the other and contributing to the formation of class. In this sense, "consumption practices sometimes express individual taste, but, more importantly, serve to articulate a collective social identity" (abstract).

Symbolic boundaries

Meier and Karsten (2012) explored identity formation connected to place and, more specifically, residential location. This involves at the individual level the development of specific "attitudes towards, and social cultural practices in, residential space" (p. 158) and also involves judgement

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and classification of these attitudes and socio-cultural practices "in order to draw symbolic boundaries between 'people like us' and the 'other'" and between 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' behaviour (Savage, 2010 in Meier and Karsten, 2012, p. 518).

Social and symbolic boundaries are particularly relevant in the situation of specific residential neighbourhoods, but can also be applied to a wider context of class formation. According to Giddens, 'selfidentity' is is socially constructed through personal narrative, meaning that people construct narratives to give meaning to themselves, their relationships with others and their place of residence. A collective social identity is then based on symbolic boundaries created through taste, consumption and personal narrative (Meier and Karsten, 2012, p. 251).

In many Chinese cities, high-rise residential compounds offer a space where residents can express and shape their identity. As "people produce their identity in and through places, especially home places" (Meier and Karsten, 2012, p. 520), location choice relates to place identity and the goals and aspirations they have regarding place identity (p. 520). Preferences for particular locations or styles of development might act as a means of displaying distinction and in this sense, property and residential location are fundamental to class formation (p. 520). This applies to the Chinese context as well, where "real estate has become a common signifier of middle-class status among urban families" (Tomba ,2010, in Li, 2010, p. 193).

Middle-class aspirations
Agnew (1983) discusses the relationship between class and success goals involving social mobility, security and self-actualization, e.g. education and income level, employment type and job advancement and importance. He found that a distinction could be made between aspirations in absolute and relative terms. Absolute terms involve how much income, education and occupational prestige an individual aspires to achieve. Relative terms involve "the extent to which an individual desires a particular success goal relative to the extent that the individual desires other goals" (p. 436). In spite of equal exposure to the same universal emphasis on success and encouragement through the mass media, the educational system and other socializing agents, there are differences in terms of success goals between the middle class and the lower classes for both relative and absolute aspirations (p. 438). This means that individuals within different classes will have goals and priorities most relevant to their social and economic circumstances focus on "the achievement of goals which are within their reach" (p. 439 - 450). For the lower classes, "basic needs, such as security, take precedence when the satisfaction of these needs is in doubt" (p. 439). Having achieved a certain level of security, the middle class has "the luxury to take security for granted" (p. 450) and will therefore focus more on self-actualization goals.

1.4 Parenting values and practices

Concerted cultivation and the pursuit of self-making
Self-actualization goals are reflected in the hopes, expectations and orientations middle-class parents have regarding their children. It is important, first of all, to note that studies about class-related parental values and practices in middle-class families in a Western-European context have shown that dominant themes were "a desire that children should be happy and healthy", as well as education and becoming 'morally decent people' (Irwin and Elley, 2011, p. 485). Other

class-specific results show that the middle classes followed "a logic of 'concerted cultivation', treating their children as a developmental project" (p. 481). Lareau (2002) applied the concept of 'concerted cultivation' in his study about social class and childrearing in black families and white families. She found that middle-class parents tend to conform to this cultural logic, which involves enrolling their children in multiple "age-specific organized activities that dominate family life and create enormous labour, particularly for mothers"(p. 748). Parents do this in their pursuit of specific goals for their children, which include transmitting important life skills and developing special talents. In this sense, 'concerted cultivation' should be understood in the context of the 'pursuit of self-making', and "is part of a process of experimentation of making and finding the child, ensuring that talents and abilities are located and made the most of" (Vincent and Ball, 2007, p. 1070). According to Lareau, this individualistic approach results in an emphasis on children's performance and is found predominantly in middle-class parenting, as opposed to working-class parenting.

Enrichment activities and class-reproduction strategies
Middle-class parenting or class-reproduction projects and strategies involve investing "time, and intellectual and emotional energies" (Irwin and Elley, 2011, p. 481) in their children's' 'enrichment activities', such as taking part in extracurricular activities and tutoring. This also concerns helping their children realizing certain academic achievements. Involvement in enrichment activities are seen by middle-class parents as 'good parenting' and "is recognized as such by other (...) middle-class parents" (p. Vincent and Ball, 2007, 1068). Irwin and Elley furthermore argue that "involving their children in organized activities is seen as a common practice amongst middle-class household and one which is considered to exemplify middle-class forms of cultural investment" (p. 481). More importantly, it has become "more strategic in the current socio-economic context, with parents being increasingly exercised by how to secure and pass on advantage to their children" (p. 481). This can be explained by a certain level of social insecurity or class-anxiety experienced by middle-class parents who aim to secure class advantages to their children, or reproduce them in the middle-classes. Investing in enrichment activities may then be part of a strategy to expose their children to information and activities that are middle-class worthy, and cultivate middle-class values, behaviour and conventions (Irwin and Elley, 2011; Vincent and Ball, 2007).

Enrichment activities and social boundaries
In general, extracurricular activities, consumption and leisure are "highly classed" and related to notions of taste and distinction (Vincent and Ball, 2007, p. 1061). Vincent and Ball refer to Bourdieu in their discussion about the role of enrichment activities. Bordieu argues that particularly music lessons can act as a classificatory practice that may strengthen or challenge social boundaries. Interest in specific musical genres, particularly classical music, and participation in music lessons demonstrates appropriate taste and establishes distinction from those who do not. Through piano lessons, he argues, parents are able to have their children acquire specific cultural capital from an early age and distinguish themselves from other children and parents (p. 1066). This can be interpreted as symbolic boundary drawing in child-rearing as practised by middle-class parents.

Modern ideal of parenthood
The modern ideal of parenthood, then, is one of active involvement. According to Shaw (2008), parents tend to feel the need to "be involved in every aspect of their children's lives, including

their children's 'free time'" (p. 699). For example, family leisure is, in this context, "not a freely chosen form of participation, but (…) rather (…) a duty or a responsibility" (Shaw and Dawson, 2001, p. 228). Shaw and Dawson describe family leisure as a form of 'purposive leisure' which parents take part in in order to achieve particular short- and long-term goals. The purpose of such activities reflects a general belief in the importance of demonstrating and developing certain values and lifestyles that will be important for their children's success in life (Shaw, 2008; Shaw and Dawson, 2001).

Parenting in China

Although most studies about class and parenting are based on cases in Europe and North America, other literature indicates that Chinese parents may also experience a certain level of social insecurity and feel pressure to be a member of a particular community (Fong, 2006; French, 2006; Li, 2010; Short, 2005; Zhang, 2010). According to Li (2010), this is not caused by "any identifiable organization or written rules, but yet is all-pervading and imbued in the everyday cultural milieu" (p. 122). Apart from housing choices, reflected in homeownership and community type and location, the awareness and formation of middle-class identity of urban residents is also reflected and expressed through other activities, behaviour and views related to childhood, the family and parenting. This should be understood in a cultural and historical context that is defined by increasing competition between students and jobs; social insecurity resulting in a quest for middle-class or upper-class lifestyles for the child or the family in general; and a one-child policy leading to high social and financial expectations focused on child only (Fong, 2006; French, 2006; Li, 2010; Short, 2005; Zhang, 2010). This involves parents taking part in "proper consumption to validate their status" and gain prestige (Li, 2010, p. 124), which is also expressed through the aspirations parents have for their children's future and the investments they make in order to reach their goals. In their pursuit of a specific social status, middle-class parents generally invest heavily in their children's schooling, leisure activities and upbringing (Li, 2010; French, 2006; Short, 2005). Zhang (2010) points out the importance of acquiring cultural capital in this context, particularly for the higher segments of the middle class: "excessive investments in cultivating their children's talents and abilities in order to prepare them to become the cultured elites". This is based on the notion that cultivating cultural capital, or different elements that comprise cultural capital, of their children will ultimately result in a better reputation and more respectability (p. 9).

1.5 Public space

Orum and Neal (2010) compiled a comprehensive collection of a number of different influential and relevant readings about public space. In the introduction Orum defines public space as "all areas that are open and accessible to all members of the public in a society in principle though not necessarily in practice" (p. 1). Applying this definition, one can think of different examples of public space such as parks; places that serve a specific use and role such as playgrounds and sports areas; and streets and public squares. Additionally, an increasingly important part of the public domain are more commercial and privatized areas such as shopping malls (Lawton, 2007).

Goheen (1998) discusses different views on the function and value of public space in the modern city and argues that some of the reasons why public space is meaningful are that

citizens from different groups in society use it to express their attitudes and use it for their own purposes (p. 479). Orum and Neal discuss the social dimensions of public space and attribute its complexity to the numerous opportunities it provides to "interact with both strangers and acquaintances and to understand our position in the social world". In similar vein, Ijla (2012) argues that "public space is a place for social interaction that facilitates the exchange of words between people not likely to interact relative to their social groups" (p. 49). Orum and Neal furthermore argue that public space offers a place where individuals form their social networks and express their identity:

> *"the interactions we have with friends in public spaces like neighbourhood streets and local restaurants are the foundation of our social networks; the close social bonds we develop in these settings provide a sense of belonging and security. Similarly, the interactions we have with strangers in public spaces help us to understand our position in the world and how society expects us to act when we are 'in public'. It is where we go to see and be seen; where we go to express our unique identities to one another"* (p. 5).

Parochial space

Although the public realm undoubtedly has significant social value, the assertion that public space facilitates public culture and builds sociality might be overdrawn. Addressing the relationship between collective culture and urban public space, Amin (2006) argues that "the dynamics of mingling with strangers in urban public space are far from predictable" (p. 7), which is a result of differences in social experience, expectations and conduct in public space. These differences are evident as well between different groups in society in terms of mobility and use of public space. Particularly the young middle-classes take part in different activities in a variety of different locations within the city. This means that spatial networks of different groups in society hardly overlap. This is what Hajer and Reijndorp (2002) interpret as "a collection of of cultural-political parishes" (p. 84) or the *parochialization* of public space. Hajer and Reijndorp argue that the perception of public space as "a neutral meeting place for all social groups regardless of class, ethnicity or lifestyle" (p. 85) is an exaggeration or misinterpretation of the function of public space. Because "people increasingly use space *a la carte*, frequenting those exact events, festivals, schools and shops that conform to their identity and avoiding other places", public spaces rather functions as "a transit zone between enclaves of different variations on 'our kind of people'" (p. 84). Each individual selects the places they use based on their needs, preferences, abilities and limitations. These are similar within each different group in society, which means that often the composition of the public visiting specific places is consistently homogenous. Each group and each individual select their own public domain (p. 85) and collectively they determine a place's rule-based behaviour. The 'code of behaviour' defined by the dominant group is what produces a visitor's experience of a public place, as it allows them to reflect on their own lifestyle and view of reality (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2002; Amin, 2006).

Public Space in Chinese Cities

The function and definition of public space in China differs from the Western context because of historical and societal factors. Peter Gaubatz (2008) examined the new ways in which public space is being created in Chinese cities, drawing from cases in Beijing and Shanghai. Hyper-urbanization, following national reforms and modernization, has brought new public space to

these cities. Gaubatz (2008) lists several different studies that distinguish different types of public space in Chinese cities, but generally include formal urban public space such as plazas, squares and parks, commercial space, pedestrian space and green space (p. 73).

According to Gaubatz (2008), the number of different types of public space and quasi-public space in Chinese cities was limited until the 20th century. Prior to 1949, the different spaces in traditional Chinese cities were divided by walls and had limited accessibility. Public spaces became more available and accessible with changes in society, the economy, technology and power relations. Public places in post-revolution Chinese cities were approached with a new socialist, participatory perception of the public sphere and many new large-scale, wide and open public places were created. The massive, open public square or plaza became a popular design introduced in many Chinese cities during this time. In the beginning, it could serve the purpose of accommodating mass-demonstrations but did not necessarily offer a location for everyday activities or gathering. At the same time, walled and gated spaces remained. Gaubatz points out that "with many of these walled complexes containing not only spaces of work but also residential, educational, recreational, and social service spaces, public life retreated, to a large extent to the confines of the home compound" (p. 75). During the reform era, new public spaces emerged as urban planning and development shifted focus towards more international models and standards. The function of, for example, large-scale plazas changed during this time as more local residents used these spaces for recreation and commercial activities. They also function as a "significant display area and centrepiece of a landscaping effort" (p. 77) Walled, gated and fenced-off spaces remained an important urban structure but became more open and accessible. Gradually it is being replaced by more international structures and architecture, meaning that walls slowly disappeared, especially in more recent commercial areas.

The most recent development of public space in Chinese cities is related to increasing investment in the construction of new, privately owned and developed commercial spaces (Gaubatz, 2008; Law, 2002; Orum and Neal, 2010). Privatization of public space usually refers to "the increased trend for us to live our everyday life in private spaces, such as business estates shopping centres and privately owned housing enclaves, or gated communities, and the increased influence of private forces within public space" (Lawton, 2007, p. 8). Rapid development of shopping malls and other spaces of mass consumption means that Chinese urban space is "increasingly commercialized" (Gaubatz, 2008, p. 78; Law, 2002). Commercial spaces such as shopping malls generally include entertainment and public or semi-public facilities and are popular destinations for local residents. At the same time, the increased influence of such privatized commercial areas influence human activity and experience in the public domain (Gaubatz, 2008; Law, 2002; Lawton, 2007).

Lisa Law (2002) describes the transformation of Central Hong Kong's public spaces and the meanings attached to it. According to Law, "new forms of public space are being produced in response to global forces or transnational capital" (p. 1643). In Hong Kong, corporatisation of development results in the disappearance of public space and increase of corporate control over activities of the public that occur in these places (p. 1628). She argues that "public spaces are not incorporated into development projects for democratic ideals", meaning that local residents are not active participants in the creation and development of public space, but are merely traipsing over these spaces as passive subjects." (p. 1629). Some argue that this goes for

commercial spaces as well, as these are generally highly regulated, surveyed and "carefully managed for controlled consumption"(Gaubatz, 2008, p. 80).

High-rise living

Another new form of public space emerged in the popular residential structure of the gated community. Rapid urbanization and expansion of the wealthy and middle-class population lead to a growing demand for affordable homes that meet middle-class standards. This calls for large-scale planning and redevelopment projects. Ideas and ideals behind popular types of high-density, mass produced real estate development are based on the concept of high towers in a green area, separated from adjacent areas in the city by walls. Services, facilities and private security are generally included within the project (Hulshof and Roggeveen, 2011; Li, 2010; Orum and Neal, 2010; Zhang, 2010). According the Hulshof and Roggeveen (2011), these 'compounds' are a typical Chinese urban housing model that has become so popular and successful that "it has seemingly made all other form of housing superfluous" (p. 110). Such developments target middle-class demands and preferences for peace, security and separation from China's dynamic and restless metropolitan environments (Hulshof and Roggeveen, 2011; Zhang, 2010). These types of mass-produced property often lack character and sense of place, and the absence of enjoyable and functional public space shows that these type of projects do not necessarily take into account what residents might need (Hulshof and Roggeveen, 2011, p. 46). The physical structure of such constructions poses barriers to access and active use of public space and citizen's interaction with their surroundings, including both the social and physical environment.

Children's use of public space

Studying different aspects of high-rise living in the context of family life is particularly interesting because of the barrier high-rise construction seems to pose between private and public space and access to public space for children. Karsten (2003) studied children's use of public space deals with restrictions that urban environments pose and views for example playgrounds as a compensation for "the daily restrictions that children growing up in an urban environment encounter" (p. 457). Such restrictions are important to consider when studying high-rise residential environments because public space can offer different functions for children. A western perspective on children's upbringing involves that "children need to meet, play and communicate with other children" as it is "an essential part of the process of growing up" (Karsten, 2003, p. 459). The playground, for example, is a location where children meet and interact with other children, build networks and develop social skills. Karsten describes it as a unique and essential place in an urban environment. Karsten furthermore argues that "class is an important determining factor in children's daily outdoor play and other out-of-school activities "(p. 460).

Freeman and Tranter (2011) note that "while society is clearly important to children, it is only half the equation. As well as being shaped by their social world, children are shaped by their physical world: the places and spaces in which they grow up" (p. 4). Furthermore, "place, like society, shapes and influences behaviours, the spirit, sociability, opportunities, play, health, independence, physical and mental well-being, and even happiness" (p. 4). Public space offers a location for socializing, play and development of skills and knowledge. Through diverse

activities children create their own space in the city and their neighbourhoods, where they explore, encounter and engage with the world. In this setting they form their individual social relationship and socialize 'as part of the world' (p. 14).

2. Methodology

2.1 Operationalization of main concepts

Reviewing the literature, several expectations and assumptions were raised about middle-class families in Shenzhen, the way they shape their class identity in the city and the ways in which their children use public space. The different concepts are defined and their operationalization will be explained below. The relationship between the different concepts and variables involved are presented in a conceptual scheme later on.

The key concepts included in the conceptual model: are middle-class identity formation; middle-class aspirations; parenting values and practices; high-rise living; children's use of public space. In addition, definitions of other relevant concepts such as *middle class* and *public space* are given as well in order to provide clarity about the approach taken in the research and the selection of participants and research sites. The operational definition of the different relevant concepts indicates how the they will be measured in the study. The measurement of such subjective variables will rely on personal interpretation.

Middle class

Within the context of this research about middle-class families in Shenzhen, it is necessary to explore the concept of 'middle class' as a social designation. Taking into account the diversity in terms of occupations and social backgrounds, the term 'middle classes' is more appropriate. The definition includes education level, occupation level and a similar orientation in lifestyle. Lifestyle orientation is not only defined by common characteristics reflected in consumption, housing choices and parenting, but also by a shift away from Chinese tradition and Maoist socialism. Four subclasses in terms of occupation define the Chinese middle-class population: 1. private entrepreneurs or the capitalist class; 2. professionals, managers, and government officials, or the new middle class; 3. small employers, small business owners, and the self-employed, or the old middle class; and last, 4. low-wage white collar and other workers.

Middle class identity formation

The formation of middle-class identity of urban residents is reflected in several activities and behaviour, and the ways in which views and aspirations are implemented. A social identity is created by the construction of self and establishing the relationship to 'the other'. In Chinese society, this involves consumption, pursueing social distinction and drawing symbolic boundaries between themselves and other parents. This is reflected in consumption patterns, location choice of area of residence and the way parents raise their children.

Middle-class aspirations

The Chinese middle classes may experience a certain level of social insecurity and feel pressure to be a member of a particular community. At the same time, having achieved a certain level of security, the middle class focuses on self-actualization goals, rather than goals related to

achieving or preserving economic security. Furthermore, middle-class work and an advanced education promote a focus on these self-actualization goals. These involve job advancement, employment type and job importance, but also specific education levels. The middle classes also aim to secure their status and guarantee a certain lifestyle and standard of living for their children individually and their family as a whole.

Parenting values and practices
Middle-class parents are concerned with both their children's life skills and experiences and the future status of their family and children and seek to reproduce their children within the middle classes. They often treat their children as a development project, ensuring high educational attainment and organizing their children's lives around several different enrichment activities. Investing in enrichment activities can be seen a strategy to expose their children to information, behaviours and activities that are middle-class worthy, and cultivate middle-class values, behaviour, conventions and institutions. Simultaneously, middle-class goals involve self-actualization and are realized or pursued through these reproduction strategies. A 'good' parent is actively involved and presents a variety of opportunities and support for the child to have a wide range of learning experiences. These are key in both the 'pursuit of self-making' and the process of symbolic boundary drawing.

High-rise living
Living in high-rise residential projects can be seen as an expression of taste and status. This is because it shows appreciation of aesthetic elements and urban life. Walls and gated furthermore act not only as physical, but also a symbolic barrier between residents and others. Members of the new urban middle class in China seek social distinction and actively express and shape their identity through residential location and housing choice, of which high-rise living in newly constructed compounds is an example.

Public space
Areas that are supposed to be open to all members and different groups in society, but might not necessarily be in reality. Applying this definition, one can think of different examples of public space such as parks; places that serve a specific use and role such as playgrounds and sports areas; and streets and public squares. As each group and each individual select their own public domain, the public visiting different places is often consistently homogenous. This parochialization of public space means that social interaction between strangers is less applicable than people of the same group using or claiming specific places. Public space is increasingly commercialized and privatized, resulting in a new experience of public spaces such as shopping malls. This also involves increased regulation and surveillance of visitors activities and management of controlled consumption.

Children's use of public space
Public space offers a location for socializing, play and development of skills and knowledge. Through diverse activities children create their own space in the city and their neighbourhoods, where they explore, encounter and engage with the world. In this setting they form their individual social relationship and socialize 'as part of the world'. Children engage in many

different kinds of activities in public space which impacts and shapes behaviours, sociability, opportunities, play, health, independence, and physical and mental well-being. The physical structure of high-rise residential projects may pose barriers to access and active use of public space and citizen's interaction with their surroundings, including both the social and physical environment. In this sense it may influence the way in which children use public space in a high-density urban environment like Shenzhen.

The table below gives a brief overview of how the different concepts are operationalized.

Operationalization

Concept	Operationalization
Middle-class identity formation	Construction of self Relationship to 'the other' Social distinction Symbolic boundaries *Consumption* *Aspirations* *Parenting values and practices* *Residential location and housing* *Choice*
Middle-class aspirations	Social anxiety Self-actualization goals *Employment type* *Job importance and advancement* *Educational achievent* Secure social status Guarantee/pursue certain standard of living

Parenting values and practices	Active involvement to ensure success in life
	Children as a development project
	Concerted cultivation
	    Class-(re)production
	    Social distinction and boundaries
	Enrichment activities
	    Self-making
	Important life skills and lessons
	Develop special talents
	    Educational attainment

High-rise living	Social distinction and symbolic boundaries *Expression of taste and status* *High-rise residential projects*
Children's use of public space	Activities Interaction Social relationships and networks Behaviour Skills and learning Constraints: high-rise environment

2.2 Conceptual model

Drawing from the literature discussed earlier, it is expected that middle-class parents in Shenzhen are conscious about their new and flexible position in a developing Shenzhen social hierarchy. From this arises a level of social anxiety which results specific decisions and behaviour. This means that they will form a new middle-class identity in a city without existing class structure and without an existing middle class with whom to compare themselves. Forming a middle-class identity comes with specific life goals and aspirations. Having achieved a certain level of economic security, middle-class goals focus more on self-actualization. At the same time, middle-class goals also include securing social status and guaranteeing or accomplishing a standard of living that is distinct from the lower classes, including farmers and workers. The process of shaping and securing a middle class position, then, consists of different factors. A key element is symbolic boundary drawing. By drawing symbolic boundaries between themselves and others, they establish their relationship to 'the other' and form a social identity. Creating social distinction is part of drawing symbolic boundaries. This is pursued through specific consumption patterns reflected in, for example, housing choice and residential location. Social distinction is also pursued through different parental styles and strategies. Parents set high goals for their children and involve them in different enrichment activities aiming to set them apart from other children. Parenting values and practices are expected to be reflected in the way their children use public space. As parents are actively involved in their children's everyday life, they are expected to have control over the places they go, the activities they take part in and the social relationships and networks they make. Furthermore, public space is where individuals can express their identity and have social interactions with others. This involves, for example, networking and learning and demonstrating certain behaviour. Public space will, therefore, offer a place for social distinction but also for networking and is therefore expected to be an important area in the formation of parent's middle-class identity formation.
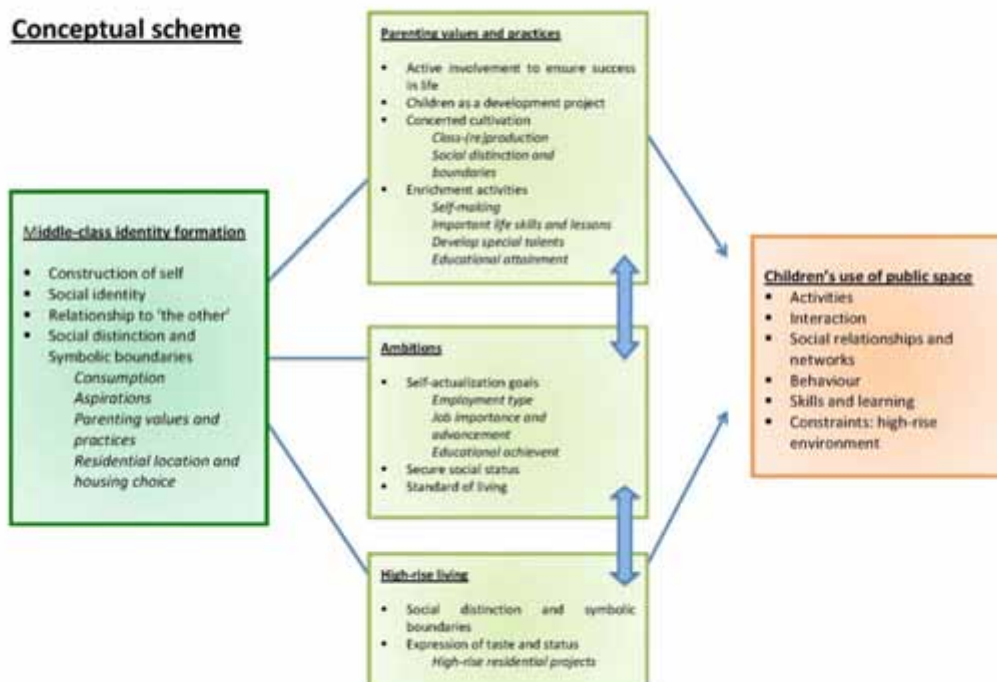
2.3 Research question and sub-questions

The conceptual model raises the following research question: *How do children living in high-rise communities use public space and how is this related to the middle-class identity formation of their parents?*

In order to explore the different sub-themes of the main research question, 4 different sub-questions are formulated.

1. *How do parents organize the daily lives of their children?*

In order to gain insight into parenting values and practices of Chinese urban middle-class parents, it is important first of all to have an understanding of how parents organize the daily lives of their children. As parents are actively involved in their children's lives, this question focuses on the decisions parents make for their children and what kind of education and activities their children take part in. An overview of the different kind of activities children take part in, when, how often and with whom.

2. *How do children living in high-rise communities use public space?*

In order to establish the relationship between children's use of public space and their parent's middle-class identity formation, it is necessary first of all to gain insight into how children living in high-rise projects in Shenzhen use public space. A picture is painted of where children go, how often and with whom. This question involves children's activities, interaction, behaviour and social relationships and networks. As public space is expected to be an important area for networking and forming social distinction as well, this question also involves children's and families' activities, networking and behaviour.

3. *What are the parenting values and practices of Chinese urban middle-class parents?*

This question is included to gain more knowledge about how middle-class parents in Shenzhen raise their children and why they do this in a particular way. It addresses how the participants view themselves as parents and involves the choices parents make and the motivations, ideas and ideals behind these choices.

4. *How do parents shape and express their middle-class identity?*

This chapter deals with the social anxiety parents might experience, the aspirations and goals they have for themselves and for their children and the social boundaries they create in order to establish their relationship to neighbours or other Shenzhen parents. According to Leyshon and Bull (2011, p. 64 in Meier and Karsten, 2011) "people should be seen as cultural agents embedded in social processes producing their own narratives of their everyday lives" (Leyshon and Bull, 2011, p. 64) based on this idea Meier and Karsten "analyse the narratives through which symbolic boundary drawing becomes apparent" (p. 518). Based on this perspective, this question also deals with whether, and how, symbolic boundary drawing is an important element of identity formation of middle-class parents by analysing and comparing the narratives of their own everyday lives and day-to-day activities, choices and decisions.

2.4 Data Collection

The nature of this research is mainly descriptive and explorative, based on interviewing and participant observation. The core of my research draws on findings from in-depth, semi-structured interviews and shorter on-site interviews with middle-class parents of families living in high-rise neighbourhoods. Using a snowball technique with multiple entries, the total number of in-depth interviews is 19 and the total number of on-site interviews is 18. With help of Chinese students and contacts provided by our supervisors we found the majority of our participants. Whether the participants belonged to the middle class was determined by establishing their education level, profession, occupation and residence type. The data were collected over a time period of around 5 weeks in one research phase, during which the longer, in-depth interviews were conducted and the shorter, on-site interviews were combined with (participant) observations in public places. This involved an open strategy, as my knowledge about urban life and children's use of public space in the Chinese context was limited.

Translators
The majority of the interviews were conducted with the help of Chinese student volunteers. Many of the parents we interviewed did not speak any English and the help of translators was essential and extremely helpful. 6 student volunteers helped with conducting the longer in-depth interviews and 6 student volunteers helped with conducting the shorter interviews in public places. Before starting the interviews, we gave a brief introduction of our research topics and gave an overview of the proposed questions. Several volunteers helped with more than one interview and they acquired a deeper understanding of our research. Some of the participants were sufficiently to perfectly fluent in English and they were able to participate in the interview without the help of volunteers.

In-depth interviews
Most of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 75 minutes and were conducted with one parent, usually the mother. The in-depth interviews included the following themes: family background, employment, children's education, children's extra-curricular activities, family leisure activities, parenting views and practices and future expectations. These themes were included to gain data measuring the different concepts relevant to my research and in different ways would help answer my research questions and those of a fellow student. Because the interviews combined both the research of myself and the other student conducting a space-time analysis of middle-class family life in Shenzhen (Ter Brugge, 2013), the interviews focused on both the organization of daily activities as well as motivations and possible goals and ambitions that parents might have regarding these activities. Along the way, the topic list and interview guide was adapted slightly several times in order to improve and broaden the data obtained from the interviews. Due to time-constraints and occasionally language barriers, not all questions were addressed in each single interview, but generally every topic was covered. It proved to be challenging to discuss public places and children's use of public space during the in-depth interviews. This topic was, therefore, discussed mostly during on-site interviews where we were able to ask parents directly about their activities, urban environment and motivations for visiting these places. The complete topic list and interview guide including an introduction for volunteer translators is included in the appendix.

On-site interviews

Observations in public space were done to gain more insight into activities of middle-class families and activities and behaviour of children in public places such as playgrounds, parks, squares, other public facilities and privatized public space such as shopping malls. Most of these places were large-scale areas in the central districts of Shenzhen (Nanshan, Futian and Luo Hu). These were also the locations where shorter on-site interviews were conducted (N=18) involving questions about the family's activities, their motivations for visiting a specific place, their perception of the environment and other visitors and other places they frequent. On-site interviews and observations were conducted around the Children's Palace area, including the Book Centre, a large square with many activities, Lian Hua Shan Park and smaller rooftop square on top of the Book Centre. Other areas include the Mangrove Seaside Ecology Park, an Ice Skating Rink at the Holiday Plaza mall in OCT and OCT Loft. The different areas are shown on the map below. Using an approach consistent with the places outlined in the literature, these specific sites were chosen because parents often gave these as examples of places where they often take their children or of their favourite destinations. Many of these sites also had an audience of which a large part consisted of families and where many children were seen. Many facilities in the area surrounding Children's Palace were specifically designed for children and were, therefore, also ideal locations for observations and on-site interviews with parents.

Map 1 - On-site

Source: CNN
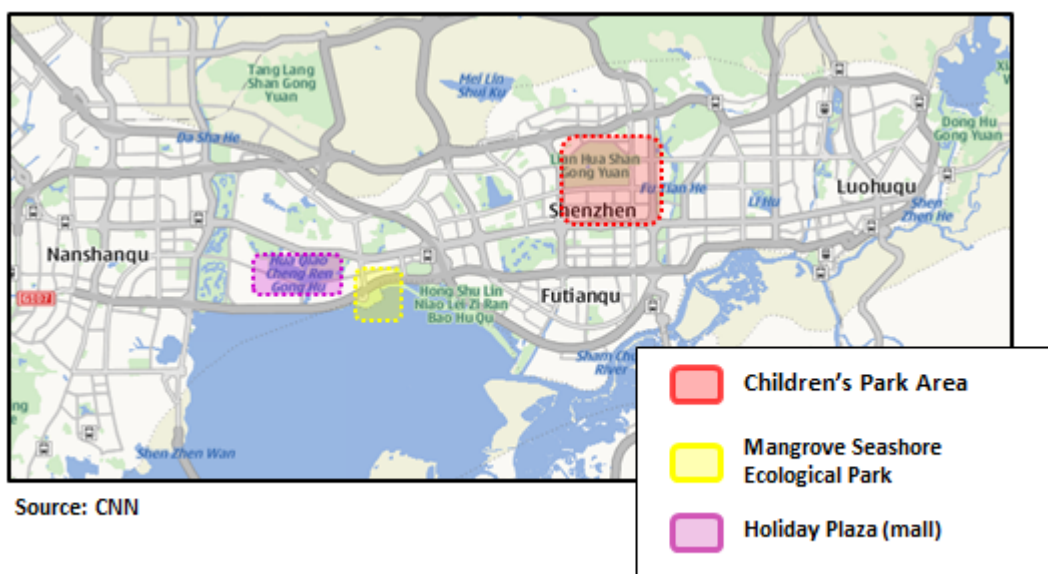
Participants

An overview of all participants and their important characteristics is included in the appendix. This paragraph is a summary and interpretation of the most relevant information about the group of participants.

Age

Most children were between the age of 5 and 10. This age group was chosen because it was expected that children would be both enrolled in school and participating in several activities, while parents would still be strongly involved with the organization of the daily lives of their

children. This age group also seemed to be the most dominant group in public places and facilities for children. The majority of families had 1 child, a small number of families had two children. These parents had worked their way around the one-child policy and *hukou* (residency) system and had, for example, given birth to one or more of their children in Hong Kong.

Education and employment
Almost all parents who participated in in-depth interviews went to university, a very small number of parents completed Junior High School or High School. The most common degrees were in business, accounting, finance, medicine, architecture and engineering. Most of the participants had jobs that are included in the definition of middle class as described in the theoretical framework and conceptual overview. These include private entrepreneurs, managers, government officials, business owners, the self-employed, doctors, architects professors, consultants, accountants and office employees. Finding members of the lower-middle classes willing to participate in an interview appeared to be challenging, as a consequence of which it was not possible to interview low-wage white collar and other workers. Many of the mothers obtained a bachelor degree, often in accounting, and quit their job when they started a family.

Housing
The families lived in different types of high-rise neighbourhoods. Some of these high-rise neighbourhoods were gated communities, others lived in former government housing. One family did not live in a high-rise neighbourhood, this was an exceptional case as high-rise residential towers are a popular construction type in Shenzhen. As space is scarce and population growth is high, housing is expensive and the majority of the population cannot afford a detached home.

Location
The majority of the families lived in the three central districts of Shenzhen: Luo Hu, Nanshan and Futian, shown on the map below. These areas were chosen because these are the oldest and most central areas in the city with many high-rise residential projects, whose prices are out of reach for the migrant workers moving to the city from other parts of China. Furthermore, the middle-class population has a particularly strong influence here on the built environment, available facilities and commercial activities. The overall image and ambiance of these areas is dominated by elements of the middle-class lifestyle. Several families live in Longhua District, a sub-district of Bao'an district relatively close to Nanshan and Futian, also shown on the map below. Although Bao'an District has a large migrant worker population, evidence of a growing middle class is visible here as well in the large number of high-rise projects and construction sites.

Map 2 – Participants (In-depth and on-site)
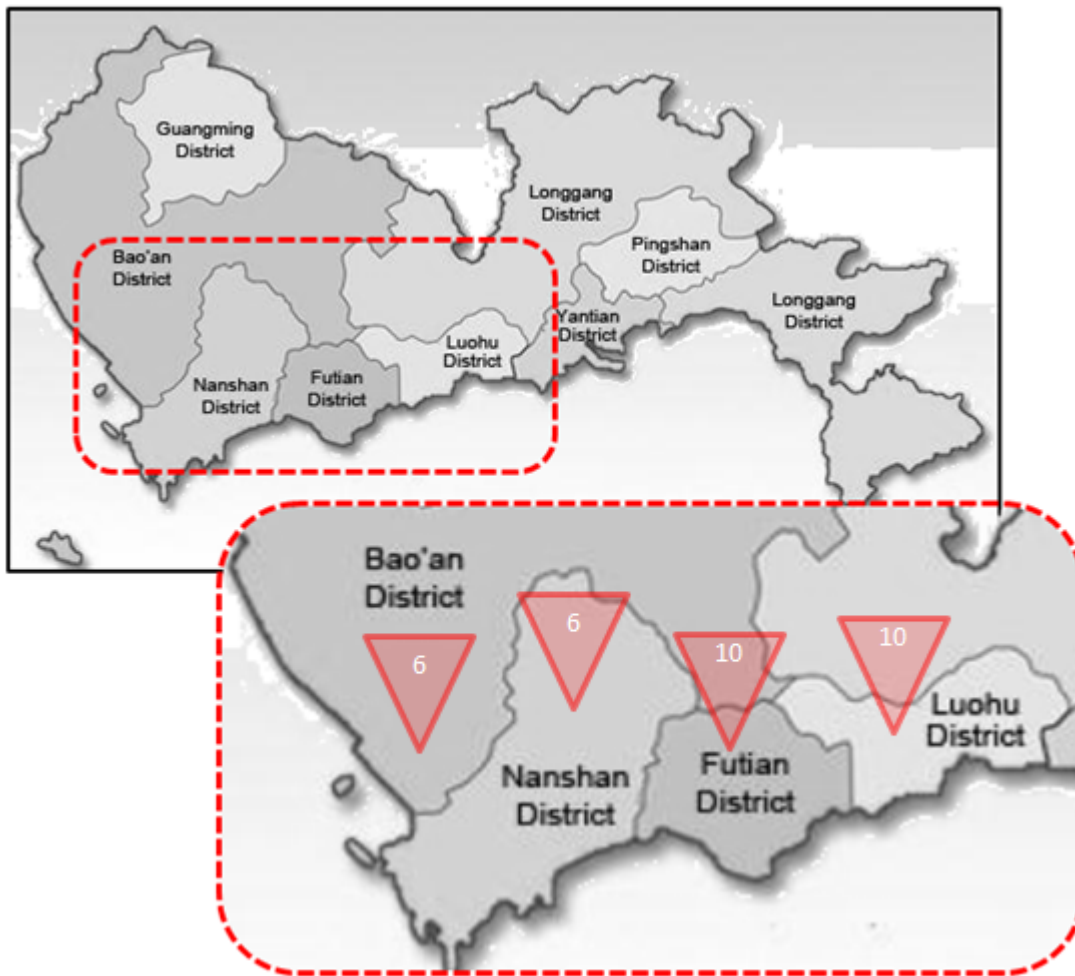
Source: WQS China Interpreters, 2011

Obstacles

A few obstacles and challenges arose throughout the fieldwork in Shenzhen. For example, many parents were not willing to participate in an on-site interview. Especiallly at the mall (Holiday Plaza in OCT, Nanshan) and at Lianhuashan Park (Futian), parents were often suspicious about being approached for an on-site interview. Parents said they had too little time or did not have anything interesting to say. According to some of the translators, this is a common attitude towards foreigners or strangers. There seems to be a high level of general distrust which is difficult to grasp for outsiders and beginner researchers. Furthermore, the audience at Lianhuashan Park appeared to be more mixed than some of the other sites. Some of the families that were approached were working class, who are, as the translators explained, less open and willing to meet foreigners or strangers. The translators explained that many rarely or never talk to foreigners and might be somewhat overwhelmed by the direct approach. Parents at the Children's Book Centre (Futian) or OCT Loft were predominantly middle-class or upper-middle class and were more willing and interested in participating in an interview.

Interviews with professionals

Several of the volunteer translators became very interested in the study after helping conduct a number of interviews. They introduced different professionals who could give interesting insights about children's activities and public space. Some of them were architects, either involved in projects dealing with public places for children or teaching architecture classes to children. Others taught art classes to young children at private children's art centres or led organizations that offered private architecture courses for children. Although their views cannot be used to represent widely shared opinions, they offer new perspectives that help reflect on the collected data and on personal experiences and impressions.

1. Busy schedules - Organization of school and daily life

How do parents organize the daily lives of their children?

3.1 Education

Children go to school or kindergarten from around 8 in the morning until 4.30 in the afternoon. Parents generally take their children to school, usually not too far away from their home. Some children have lunch at school, but many come home for lunch and a nap. Usually the mother takes the child to school and sometimes the father will drop of the child before going to work. After school they drive them to one of the, often many, activities their children participate in. Some teenagers travel to school independently by school bus and a few very young children are picked up by a private bus service provided by the private kindergarten they attend. Most children go to public school and placement is based on the family's area of residence. Some schools have a better reputation than others, but in general the quality of public schools is expected to be good. It is common for the more upscale residential gated communities to have a kindergarten and sometimes an elementary school included within the project.

Most parents choose their children's elementary school or kindergarten because it is closest to their home. Many parents tell us that because public schools are expected to be good, they do not worry very much about the quality or reputation of the school when their children are still young and that sending their children to a school or kindergarten nearby is most convenient:

"For me, because it is very close. It is easy to take her there. Some parents want to find a better place for education, but I think it is not a big problem because she is still very young. She doesn't need to acquire much knowledge/learn a lot in this stage, she just needs to learn how to play". (#15)

Parents picking up their children from school.

Parents of children who are older and approaching Middle School age also emphasize the importance of their children's school being close to home, but are more concerned with the reputation, quality and specialization of the school. They compare the different schools available to them within their district and when possible, rely on their social or professional network to find the best school. Professional connections seem most important for parents who are either government employees or work closely with government departments.

> *"The school next to our building, inside the garden. It's very close (…). It's a Chinese-English school, it's bilingual. The school is better than other schools in this district (…). The school focuses more on the basics and it is also successful in teaching their children (…). My husband is related to urban design and planning and through his job he found out that there was a good school in this area. That's when we bought the house, because of the school".* (#14)

"It's near our place. It's a 10 minute walk. It's very close (...). "Reputation (...).We asked (...) the Department of Education. In fact, our business is with hospitals, which fall under the Department of Health. The Department of Education is in the same wing of the government building. So, I just asked the director of the Department of Health to ask the head of the Department of Education". (#12)

Most parents who talk about the reputation of their children's school tell us it is general knowledge Most parents who talk about the reputation of their children's school tell us it is general knowledge or that they found out through friends. Only one parent told us she used the internet to find out about the reputation and quality of different schools.

"My friends and I did research on the internet. Some websites talk about what schools are better and which area is good, what problems they have and so on. Internet is maybe better, because there is more information". (#10b)

3.2 Extra-curricular activities

Most children seem to have very busy schedules. Children participate in many different extracurricular activities and classes. All children take classes during the week after school and usually on the weekend as well. Most children start at a very young age, some even as young as 2 or 3 years old. The most common activities include piano lessons, dance lessons, calligraphy lessons and art lessons. Other parents send their children to Kung Fu, architecture lessons or sports. Many children take part in at least 2 activities, some take part in more. Parents also send their children to math and English classes or hire private tutors to help with their children's homework.

"A social phenomenon in China is that the child has a lot of activities after school. My daughter has six classes in the weekend so she is basically more busy than I am (...). Some of the classes my wife thinks are necessary to go to but some of the classes my daughter really wants to learn. She might do a few of them in the weekend and a few of them during the week (...).Piano, English, arts, dancing and pinyin - the official phonetic system for transcribing the sound of Chinese characters into Latin script - and the last one is provided by the kindergarten; creative math. This is not typical math but in a creative way (...). So Saturday morning she has the math and pinyin *class and around noon she has the dancing class and in the late afternoon she has english class. Sunday morning from 10AM she goes to the piano class and around 3 o'clock she goes to the art class".* (#11)

An English education centre for Children opposite of a public elementary school in Luo Hu. A boy in school uniform is running on the pavement while parents and grandparents are waiting in the corner for the school gates to open in the afternoon.

A mother at the bookstore tells us about her daughter's relatively new schedule. Her daughter is 7 years old, this is a common age at which children's schedules start to become particularly busy. This girl is one of many examples of children who participate in all the popular extra-curricular activities and

lessons. The mother explains why she doesn't take her daughter to the book centre as often as before:

> *"Because she attends primary school from Monday till Friday. She has to go to class and on Saturday my daughter attends some extracurricular classes. In the morning she goes to mathematics and English and in the afternoon piano and dancing. So from Monday 'till Saturday she doesn't have much time. On Sunday she has her free time to do what she wants to do".* (#34)

Teenagers are often just as busy as younger children. A mother who has daughter of 13 years old tells us about her daughter's busy schedule. After going to school on weekdays, she takes extra classes outside of school;

> *"From Monday until Friday, from about 7PM until 9PM, my daughter needs to go to a training centre to do her homework. Only on Saturday evening we will go out to watch a movie or do some kind of other entertainment (…). On Saturday morning, my daughter has fencing class. I take her to class and wait for her there. After lunch, we rest for two hours. In the afternoon, my daughter has Math class (…). Saturday evening we go out to watch movies and sometimes we go shopping. Sometimes we go to a restaurant together (…)in a nearby shopping centre, Coastal City, (…) because it's close to where we live. On Sunday morning, we go to church. On Sunday afternoon, my daughter has an hour of oral English class (…)".* (#14)

Children either participate in activities and classes offered by their school or participate in activities and classes organized by private training centres and organizations. Schools often organize tutoring sessions and extra-curricular classes, especially beyond elementary education, to offer a specialized curriculum. One example is ice-skating lessons taught at a nearby mall and fencing lessons.

> *"The fencing centre went to their school for recruitment, then they found children who were qualified. The fencing teacher tested the children who signed up for fencing class to find out whether they were flexible enough to learn fencing and whether they had the talent"* (#13).

Most activities are found and selected by parents themselves. Private training centres are increasingly popular amongst parents in Shenzhen. An employee at a children's art training centre describes the recent and rapid increase in the number of training centres in the country and in Shenzhen:

> *"This was established one year ago. There are four similar training centres in Shenzhen, they have it all over the country (…). There are more than 200 centres all across China. It will be more and more popular because there are more and more parents who agree with these kinds of ideas (…). These kinds of places started 5 years ago when people's economic situation got better (…). Because people became more wealthy, they became more interested in this kind of activity. Before there were no centres like this and people didn't have any ideas like this. Gradually, these kind of training centres established and people focused more on these kind of ideas, they thought it was more important".* (Children's art training centre employee)

The market has caught on with this trend and parents can now choose from a growing list of activities, lessons and facilities. Some malls have floors reserved solely for children's training centres, playgrounds and restaurants. Out of this vast supply of facilities targeted at children, parents and parenting, parents have to select those that appeal to them the most. When they do

not find out about different activities through friends, neighbours, colleagues or school teachers, they search and compare independently.

> *"I just followed the instructor of the piano class. It was recommended by a friend that his daughter met in the English class. The dance teacher used to be a part-time teacher in the kindergarten. I just followed that teacher".* (#11)

> *"I looked for a few, I checked a few places for piano lessons and talked to the teachers. And I chose the one that I felt was the best (…). We discuss about the teacher, the area surrounding the place".* (#16)

An architecture workshop for children shown on the left, a children's art centre shown on the right.

Most parents do not appear to rely on a close-knit network of friends or fellow-parents for information. One parent who seemed to rely the most on her social network when searching for tutors and classes for her daughter was a Christian mother. Her religion is very important to her and she bases her decisions regarding her daughter to a large extent on her beliefs and the opinions of members of her religious social network. None of the other parents seemed to have such a close circle of friends or acquaintances with whom to share information or parenting stories with.

> *"The math teacher was recommended by one of my friends. As for the English oral class, it was also recommended by one of my Christian friends. They were recommended by friends, their recommendation convinced me. As for the English classes, the English organization was set up by a Christian organization. We pay the fee once a year and because it's a Christian organization, it is more trustworthy".* (#14)

3.3 Leisure

Younger children (pre-school) use facilities within their gated project, or 'garden', and public facilities in the city. They play with friends, neighbours or sisters and are always accompanied

by a family member or a nanny. Older children are often very busy with school and activities during the week, but on the weekend sometimes go to the mall with their parents to do some shopping or go to the cinema. They also spend time with friends and go to each other's houses or go to the mall. However, when asked what their children do outside of school or what their children like to do in their free time, spending time with friends is not an activity that is often mentioned. Free time and leisure often involves the family or staying at home. Most leisure activities take place during the weekend, when children have free time and do not have to go to school or extracurricular activities. A mother's account of how she organizes her and her 8-year-old daughter's weekend gives a good example:

> *"We don't make special plans. On Saturday our children have extra classes. After class, we take our children out to play and go somewhere else to do sports. Most of the time we play with our children on Sunday. On Sunday we are free and our children don't have to take any extra classes. We want our children to be free on that day. Maybe we climb the hill to be more in nature".* (#30)

Particularly parents who have full-time jobs emphasize the importance of spending time with their children during the weekend. A mother working as a consultant for a large international consultancy company explains that her weekends evolve mostly around spending time and going places with her 10-year-old son.

> *"In the weekend I spend most time on seeing my son. We will play or do homework together or go to the cinema or maybe we will play badminton, sometimes we cycle along the Shenzhen bay with the nice view. Very busy".* (#10)

3.4 Grandparents

Grandparents often play a very important role in a child's life and upbringing. Standing outside an elementary school or kindergarten at around 4.30 PM you will see many grandparents waiting for their grandchildren to pick them up. It is very common to see grandparents walking hand-in-hand with their grandson or granddaughter towards home, the bust stop or metro

station after school. Grandmothers would make snacks for us during the interviews with parents who invited us into their homes. Most parents enthusiastically tell us about their family situation and the role that grandparents play in their family's life.

Some grandparents share a home with one of their children and do the cooking and cleaning, and participate in taking care of the child. Other families have one of their grandparents stay with them for a period of time when the child is little, ranging from a couple of months to a couple of years. Some parents brought their own parents to Shenzhen when they started their own family, either to live with them or to have them live close to them. A mother whose parents came to Shenzhen especially for her regularly takes her 4,5-year-old daughter to see her grandparents:

"After I pick up my child, we go to her grandparents' home and have dinner with them and spend some time with them. Almost every day, because her grandmother likes her granddaughter very much". (#27)

We asked a 36-year-old Sociology professor whether she got any help from her parents taking care of her daughter when she was younger. As for most parents, for the professor it was a natural and self-evident part of raising her children:

"Of course! My parents are from Hunan province and his parents live in another province, so they do not live in Shenzhen. They came over and live together in this apartment. We lived together (…) They come and go. When it is not a stable time, they come frequently. This year they haven't come for two semesters.". (#13)

Several parents told us they bought an apartment for their parents in Shenzhen. This way they were able to take care of their parents and they would be able to help out with raising their grandchildren. Taking care of your own parents is an important motivation for bringing grandparents to Shenzhen or taking them in to your home.

A grandfather showing his grandson outside of his home in a high-rise complex in Luo Hu

"My daughter is 4 years old. Until she was 2 years old, my daughter was taken care of my parents. After that, she was taken care of by my husband's parents. We bought another house in the same compound for my husband's parents and they will move there". (#6)

Not all grandparents come to live in Shenzhen or with their children permanently. It is not uncommon for parents to come to stay with their children once they've started their own family and leave when their help is no longer needed:

"You know in China, we need to work during the day and we need someone to help us take care of our children. So, my parents or her parents will come here, maybe for several months. She will go back after one or two months". (#15)

3.5 Domestic help

Hiring domestic help is very common among the families that were interviewed. Quite a few families have a maid, cleaning lady, cook or nanny. They either work part-time or full-time and sometimes live in the same home as the family.

"It is really common to hire someone to help. In the past I hired someone to pick up the child and bring to school and that person also cooked from Monday till Friday. While the help cooks I can play with my child". (#13)

"Yes, we have an assistant. She does the housekeeping. She comes to the house 8 hours a day. She also cooks dinner and lunch and cleans the house. Breakfast and night-snacks we do by ourselves. Night-snacks are always my job. I'm a good cook". (#12)

Nanny's often seem to play an important part in a child's upbringing, mostly in early childhood. It is common to see nannies waiting outside schools, kindergartens and training centres or to see nannies joining families on trips to the mall or playground. Nannies take children to school or kindergarten and take care of them while their parents are at work. Even when mothers do not currently have a job and stay at home to take care of their child, families sometimes hire a nanny to assist the mother with taking care of the child and the household.

> *"We hired a nanny until the child was in grade five of primary school (…). Because the grandparents are too old to help with the children, they didn't help a lot. We hired a nanny and an assistant"*. (#19)

Conclusion

Parents pay a lot of time and attention to the organization of the daily lives of their children. Daily schedules evolve around going to school and extra-curricular activities. Almost all children participate in several activities, of which the most popular are piano lessons, dance lessons, calligraphy lessons and art lessons. English and math tutoring are also often mentioned by parents. Classes take place during the week after school and also during the weekend. It is common to hire domestic help to assist with housekeeping and taking care of the children. Grandparents often help with raising their grandchildren, many families bring grandparents to Shenzhen either temporarily or permanently. Leisure activities mostly take place during the weekend and leisure time often involves the entire family, children rarely seem to do things on their own. Parents like their children to take part in different activities during the weekend and take their children to different places in Shenzhen.

2. Designed for God - Children's use of public space in Shenzhen

How do children in high-rise neighbourhoods use public space?

4.1 Observing public space in Shenzhen – availability, accessibility and safety

Local habits, patterns and dynamics in a city are not necessarily easily understood by an outsider, and particularly in Shenzhen the cultural and language barrier and size of the city further complicate this process. Therefore, in order to reflect on personal observations, impressions and experiences in public space and facilities in the city, several architects at different architecture and urban design firms were consulted. They gave new perspectives on the availability and quality of public space in Shenzhen and the city's structure, design and planning. A lack of public space that is actually accessible to the public was mentioned, as many streets an places cannot be easily used by citizens of Shenzhen. It was explained that this can be seen as a result of poor planning in the 1970s and 1980s, when the government used a top-down approach and paid little attention to what the city's residents might actually need:

> *"They didn't think about how people would live their everyday lives here, how they would walk through the city (...). I don't think Shenzhen planning is done well. Shenzhen urban planning is very typical Chinese. I think the planners of Shenzhen were very big guys in China, they were very powerful people. It was a very lucky opportunity they found Shenzhen, with almost no buildings. So they thought, we need to design the best city in the world. They did the construction of the whole city, but their planning logic is very old-fashioned. It's called modernism. They wanted a lot of cars, so the roads needed to be very wide. The blocks need to be very big. **The scale of the city is very big, they designed it for god. If god came to Shenzhen, he would like the scale, it's very wide**".*
> (Senior Architect)

Although the architects criticism of Shenzhen's planning is very understandable, it should be noted that many different areas public places in Shenzhen are visually very appealing. They seem to be carefully designed and their scale is, indeed, quite impressive. However, whether this is what Shenzhen's citizens find most enjoyable and whether these places serve the needs of the population is difficult to determine. It is very easy for first-time visitors to be impressed by the large squares, parks and boulevards, but upon further exploration the purpose and function of these places remains unclear. The architect's shares similar observations:

> *"For the government, the most important thing is creating a big image, a spectacle. So they say, you must be able to see it. It's not very important whether people can use it. People's lives, and how people use public space is not the most important. The most important is that people can take pictures of it and that it can be published in newspapers and magazines, so they can say, we did something very nice and excellent, and very huge".* (Senior Architect)

Another architect who has recently become a mother herself has similar ideas. She also observed an emphasis on the visual and disregard of practical use of public space in Shenzhen:

"It's an interesting problem actually. Public places are designed for the visuals. There are not many places to just sit down. In a way t's not very focused on lingering, it's not about that. It's about the destination you go, and then you have a nice background". (Junior Architect)

After several observations in different public places uncertainty about the availability and quality of public places for children remains. Although the city offers many places that are labelled 'children's palace' or 'children's park', it is difficult to find places that are more naturally and easily used by children. The senior architect phrases this observation and concern very well:

"I think there are not many in this city, but if you ask someone from the government they will say, we have many. There is a children's park, a children's palace and there are many different things for children. It's free and it's open, but it's only in Luo Hu. It has this name, so I think they can say, we already did something for children. But, if you walk through the city, it's difficult to find small and safe public space for children. In the private residential areas they do have them. It's ok, but it's not designed, just some simple things they have. Even in the urban villages they have some small parks for children. (Senior Architect)

Large-scale public facilities such as parks, squares, playgrounds and fields offer space for outdoor activity but do not resemble the safe environment for children that smaller spaces might offer. It is impossible to have a complete oversight of what is going in these places and the large number of visitors does not allow for the development of affinity with the general crowd. An architect from a different urban design company is concerned with the safety of public places and the large-scale public facilities as well. He also addresses the issue of residential compounds and public space available within this environment:

"The scale of the city is not that friendly for children. Of course there is children's park and playgrounds that is good for children but in general the scale is too big and it is not very safe for children (...). Even in the residential compounds the separation of pedestrians and cars is not very clear. I have a friend that got into an incident 4 years ago inside the housing compound. Because of the urbanization a lot of the people are migrating and moving. You got the feeling of insecurity because of all those strangers" (, #10).

The architect who has recently become a parent also voices concerns similar to personal impressions and experiences. According to her, spaces both inside the high-rise residential projects and outside leave much to be desired. As a new parent, she experiences the lack of places suitable and accessible for children from a new perspective:

"It's poor, it's very poor quality. It's designed by landscape architects to sell the units, it's not designed for the people that live there (...). I didn't notice until I had my own child, I didn't pay attention to this. But now I have a two-year-old and I'm concerned about the lack of this kind of environment. All the parents that I've spoken to they all have this issue. They don't know what to do with their children, almost. They want to spend time with them but there are no places". (Junior Architect)

4.2 High-rise projects

Shenzhen has many high-rise residential projects which can be found in all of the districts that were visited during fieldwork in the area (Nanshan, Luo Hu, Futian and Longhua). High-rise projects are private gated residential communities, many of the parents who live in one of these projects call them 'gardens'. The gardens that were visited were gated and guarded and only residents and residents' visitors are allowed to enter. It was noticeable that the gardens that were visited offered a secluded environment, separated from Shenzhen's traffic and crowded streets. One particular garden was attached to a shopping mall owned by the same developer, located in the middle of a dense and dynamic *urban village*[1], next to a high-way. The hustle and bustle of the streets of the urban village is barely noticeable once inside the garden.

Besides residential towers these gardens include a wide variety of different facilities for residents. These include at least one gym, recreation rooms, patios, one or more swimming pools, playgrounds and tennis, badminton and basketball courts. Children above 7 years old are rarely seen inside the garden, most of the children are between 0 and 7 years old and accompanied by a parent, grandparent or nanny. Facilities for children in the garden mostly target this age group. Playgrounds are generally smaller areas and although there are usually always a few children there around 11AM and in the afternoon after lunch and nap time, there is never gathering of larger groups of children and parents, grandparent or nannies. Even inside, where safety does not appear to be an issue, children never play alone and are always accompanied by an adult.

Carefully designed green space defines the character of the garden once inside the gates and each of the gardens that were visited shows a different variety of the same theme: lush, exotic and exclusive. Green areas are hardly ever meant for leisure or active use but generally only serve aesthetic purposes. Children don't play outside of the paths, patios or playgrounds and there are no huts made by children in trees or bushes. Sometimes there are signs that tell residents to keep off the grass or out of the hedges and flowerbeds. Gardens sometimes have small ponds, fountains or other water features. These are also not used by children and also often have signs prohibiting residents from using them for recreational

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[1] Urban village: A formerly independent village engulfed by rapid urbanization and construction, gradually incorporated into the expanding city, experiencing different stages of transformation in the process.

purposes. One particular garden even featured a small lake with a dock which was also not to be used by children or other residents. A mother of two enjoys living in a garden on the edge of Luo Hu with her two pre-school age daughters and points out the clean air and safe environment. She describes some of the amenities available in her garden and appears to be very content. For most outdoor activities besides swimming in one of the pools or playing in the playground, she and her daughters leave the garden:

"At the lobby there is a playground and there are even 3 swimming pools also inside. There are also some fruit trees, some banana and peach trees behind that building (…). We do a walk on a big road that is connected from that terminal to Da Mei Sha". (#2)

4.3 Destinations and activities

Although more upscale high-rise gated communities include carefully designed green space and facilities open to the project's residents, almost all families will go outside of their community for recreation and to spend time outdoors. Parents who were interviewed and live in former government housing also go to different places to spend time outside with their family or to do activities with their children. Shenzhen has many large-scale public facilities such as parks, playgrounds and squares which are widely used. Not every single destination mentioned in the interviews is included as it would require a very detailed map of Shenzhen and lengthy descriptions that would compromise the cohesion and comprehensiveness of this chapter. A selection of popular locations were visited for observations and on-site interviews. They are shown on the map below. More detailed maps are included in the appendix.

Map 3 - Sites
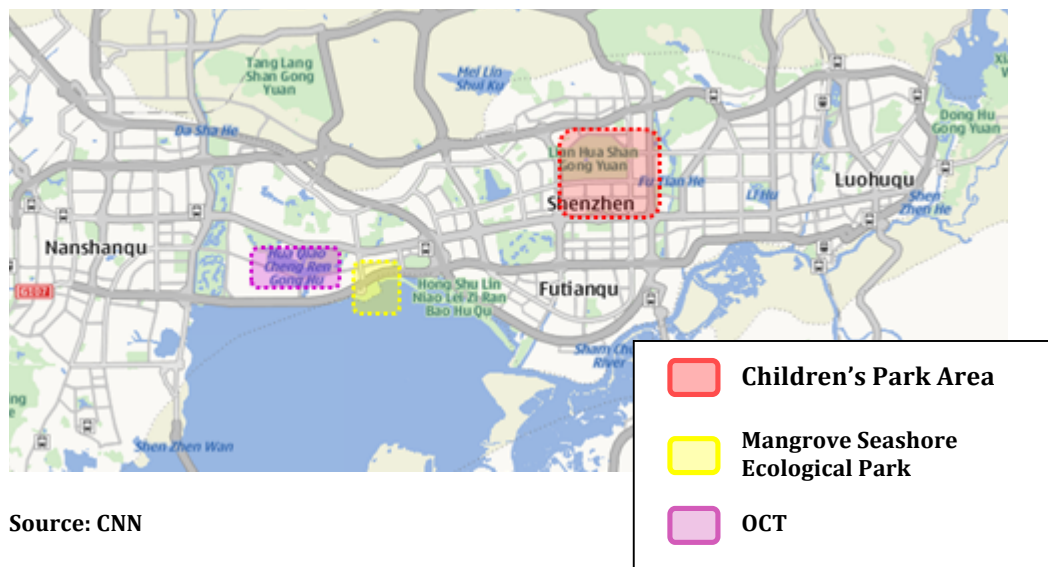
Source: CNN

🟥	**Children's Park Area**
🟨	**Mangrove Seashore Ecological Park**
🟪	**OCT**

The most popular public places are malls and large-scale public facilities including playgrounds, parks and squares. The beach or shore-side parks are also popular destinations, usually families go here on family outings during the weekend or on holidays. Other public places that families visit are more commercial, such as malls. Malls are spread out all over Shenzhen and new ones are constructed frequently. Many families spend quite a lot of time in shopping malls that not only offer a wide range of retail, but often include numerous restaurants and cafes and sometimes children's facilities as well.

"Usually we go out to the beach, because the kids like to play in the sand and the water. Sometimes we go the mall to look around. There is a big playground and we go for lunch. We meet up with friends, and we have lunch or dinner with them. The kids play together. We mostly go there for lunch. Sometimes we also go the park, climb the mountain or play in the natural park in the city near the lake". (#5)

Children's Park area
Children's Palace is a large centre designed specifically and exclusively for different kinds of activities, lessons and training for children. Most of these are of a cultural nature, including art, dance and music. Children's palace is located minutes away from the Civic Centre, an iconic landmark of Shenzhen. The area surrounding Children's Palace has different sites that are visited by masses of people, particularly families with young children. It is a popular destination listed by parents who were interviewed and many of the parents who were interviewed in this area visit often, sometimes more than once a week.

"Yes, I take my child to play. I meet up with my friend, near the Children's Palace. We buy books and go to the park. We go to see the paintings, because she likes painting (...). It has many activities for children during the weekend. There are people who tell stories to children and there are children painting and can read the books. It's free. There is also a park with many activities". (#16)

There is a large park, Lianhuashan Park, that has a children's recreation ground, where on weekends hundreds, if not thousands, families come to fly their kites and relax on the grass. Several parents listed this as one of their favourite destinations and activities. The mountain located in the middle of Lianhuashan park is also a popular destination for families to stroll, hike and climb and is a popular destination particularly amongst parents who say want their children to be healthy and active.

At the bookstore a very large section is reserved for children's books. Children between the age of and 12 are taken here by their parents after school or on the weekend. Although there is a library opposite of the book centre, the store is used in the same way as a library. Children sit down quietly in the isles or in a corner with a book taken from one of the many shelves and sometimes a parent sits down with their child to read them a story. The bookstore is evidently used not only for buying books but for browsing through the collection and reading as well. Parents who take their children here indicate that it is important for them that their children are educated and find reading books a valuable activity.

Outside the book centre and Children's Palace a large square was created. It has many small trees and benches to sit on. On weekdays this square is not very crowded and the audience consists mostly of visitor passing through from the book centre, library, Children's Palace or Civic Centre on their way to the metro station. On weekends and holidays the square is much more crowded. The audience consist mainly of young families with children. There are all kinds of entertainers demonstrating arts, music, martial arts or selling toys, jewellery and stuffed animals. Children watch the entertainment or participate in art and dance workshops. They play with toys sold by street vendors or fly a small kite. There is no playground or equipment present for children to play on, but some children use benches, concrete blocks and statues to create their own games.

Mangrove Seashore Ecological park
On a holiday or on a sunny day during the weekend the Seashore Ecological Park is a vibrant and lively place. It stretches around 8 kilometres along the shore-line of Shenzhen just 4 or 5 Metro stops away from Shenzhen's Central Business District in Futian. There are mangrove areas, fields and palm trees surrounding the wide, crowded boulevard. There are several fields where couples, groups of friends and families sit down to relax and talk or have a pick nick and where both adults and children play games or sports.

The public consists mostly of families with children between the age of 0 and 10 years old, young couples and groups of friends and elderly couples. Thousands of people walk and stroll up and down the boulevard, sit down to watch the view or use the designated bike lane to ride rental bikes available at several of the entrances.

Judging from behaviour, clothing and ways of speaking visitors represent many different groups of the Shenzhen population. There are some elderly men and women sitting on benches observing the crowd and some grandparents strolling along the boulevard with their grandchild. Although some families and couples brought their own snacks, few other people are seen eating at the park and there are no vendors who sell food. There are a many security guards keeping an eye on the crowd and the activities, but they are never seen taking action or reprimanding one of the visitors. Children are being pushed in buggies by their parents, walk or cycle with their parents, grandparents or nanny on the pavement or play in the grass or underneath the palm trees. Children play with toys, bubble guns or small kites. Several children play with the cheap plastic toys sold at the entrance of the park by one the many street vendors. Children play on their own or with other families that seem to belong to the group they came with. Children do not seem to interact with many other children. Other visitors also do not seem to meet up with other people and at none of the sites of observation did any of the visitors ever run into a friend or acquaintance.

OCT - OCT Loft
OCT is a former industrial area where old factories were converted into commercial space. It is located in Overseas Chinese Town, a more affluent area in Shenzhen. The area was transformed into a creative district, forming a cluster of European style coffee places, upscale and alternative restaurants, cultural businesses and galleries. Most these places are expensive and are affordable only to the more affluent part of the Shenzhen population. The area is quiet and green and has a pleasant and original design that is unusual for Shenzhen. A couple of parents mentioned OCT Loft as one of the places they like to visit with their child during the weekend. They welcome the variety and originality that OCT Loft offers and view it as a valuable addition to Shenzhen's family destinations.

> *"We like to go to OCT as well, because there are so many things to do and many exhibitions. I think that's the overall atmosphere in Shenzhen, that it's becoming more open to artists and designers. OCT Loft is a very successful example. There is a very nice bookshop, Old Heaven".* (#12)

On weekdays the atmosphere is relatively quiet. Couples and groups of friends and colleagues go to the area have coffee, lunch or dinner and walk around the area. Around 10AM and 11AM and in the afternoon after lunch and nap time the area is also visited by parents, grandparent and nannies with infants and toddlers. Grandparents usually take their grandchild by the hand or carry them around. Strollers do not seem to be popular in Shenzhen, although they seem to be more common in OCT than in many other areas.

During the weekend the area is much more crowded. The audience consists mostly of young people: couples, young families and groups of friends. Families with young children come to the area to have lunch at one of the restaurants or go

to a local arts and crafts fair introducing up-and-coming local artists. Children sometimes play around in one of the large statues at the entrance or play tag with other children in the open areas. However, although the area looks like an attractive place for children with many small spaces suitable for playing games, few children are actually seen playing or running.

OCT – Holiday Plaza
Holiday Plaza in the OCT area is an example of one of the countless malls that are spread all over Shenzhen. Holiday Plaza is located in the more affluent residential area of OCT, along the highway and opposite of an urban village. It resembles many of the other malls that were visited throughout the study, and includes a wide variety of high-end luxury retail and food stores, marble floors and carefully aimed and adjusted lighting and air-conditioning. There is some private security present, quietly and passively guarding and watching the crowd.

Holiday Plaza was visited on several occasions and never was there a very large crowd, although there were more visitors seen on weekends and holidays. Like in many other malls, the audience generally consisted of mostly of young visitors. Mothers and nannies with young children were often seen here, as well as groups of friends and families. Sometimes grandparents join their children or grandchildren. Children do not play or run around at the mall. They seem to be there only because their parent, grandparent or nanny takes them there. None of the stores ever had many customers, except for the more affordable clothing stores such as H&M and also the Apple Store, where a large crowd cues up every morning outside the store waiting for the doors to open. Holiday Plaza does not have any facilities or services that are especially designed for children or target children alone. Other malls often include such amenities, such as playgrounds or entertainment centres.

One of the defining of Holiday Plaza is the ice-skating rink on the ground floor, which can be viewed from the elevators and all the floors above. The ice-skating rink is used for lessons but is also open visitors, who are charged a fee per hour. The rink is mostly used by children. Every after-noon several groups of children are taken here to take ice-skating lessons for an hour. These lessons are offered by their elementary school and are not obligatory. Children do group exercises and in turns get individual instructions. Private lessons are also available but the organization is not willing to give any information about times, schedules or the age of students. There are many people standing around the ice skating ring, but these are just visitors viewing the activities taking place on the ice, parents either wait inside the waiting area or do their groceries while their child is taking a lesson. There is a waiting area for parents, grandparents and nannies, which is not accessible to the public. Parents taking their child to one of the lessons are hesitant to participate in an interview and are suspicious about strangers and foreigners taking an interest in their activities.

4.4 Interaction, social relationships and networks

Children are taken to many different places by their parents. Often the family visits places on their own and sometimes other family members, friends or neighbours join them. Several of the parents that were interviewed on-site around the Children's Palace area had joined together with other families. Sometimes these were neighbours, others were classmates and their families or family members and their children. Sometimes families brought one of their children's friends or cousin along with them. Families visit places and join other families usually on larger family outings, such as spending a day at the beach or the park.

> *"We don't go to the mall, but sometimes I take my daughter to the beach (…). Sometimes we go out with my friends and their children, together. We do this maybe once or twice a month (…). Usually, we go with my friends and sometimes we go with my daughter's friends. Sometimes, my daughter's friends' parents organize a party outside and we will all go together".* (#4)

> *"With the family we maybe spend a day at the beach. We meet some of her classmates to have a bbq there. Or we go to a place to learn something (…). Anything we like, where we'll have fun".* (#12)

Neither parents nor children appear to often meet friends, acquaintances, classmates or colleagues. Running into classmates and their parents is most frequently mentioned, but this only happens at local restaurants and sometimes at the mall. Parents often tell us they never run into people they know when they go outside to visit different places. Reasons for this include that most areas and public facilities are too big and there are too many people from all over Shenzhen, meaning that the chances of seeing someone you know are very slim. When asked if this is typical for Shenzhen they always confirm and explain that Shenzhen is too large of a city to meet the same people at places that you visit with your family, even when you visit these places regularly.

Several parents explicitly mention that they do not feel the need to meet people they know or to meet new people. They take their children to different places to spend time with their family and do not pay a great deal of attention to other families or visitors.

> *"We don't like to meet new people, we like to play with the friends we already know".* (#30)

> *"No, we don't know many people here. We just play with our family, alone. Chinese people just like to play with the family alone or with friends they already know. They don't like to meet new people here".* (#29)

One of the most striking observations in various public places is that children rarely seem to go outside on their own. They are always accompanied by an adult, a parent, grandparent or a nanny. there is standing uncommon with their for this are

Ice-skating rink at Holiday Plaza. Children take lessons with instructors while their parents are waiting and watching in the adjacent waiting room (seen in the back, red walls). Spectators on the floor above are enjoying the view and watching the activities.

When children play together in groups, always and adult or a group of adults close by or watching over. It is not to see children playing by themselves or parents. One father believes that reasons the vulnerability of children in public

places and the threats that going outside alone might pose. This is worth mentioning because it could offer a plausible explanation for this phenomenon. It should be noted, however, that he is the only parent who directly addressed this issue and might be exceptional in perceiving this fear.

> *"It's dangerous. There are too many criminals. They sell children. So they take children. Even six-year-olds are ok to sell. They also kidnap children. Even children who are 10 years old because they found out that there are many rich people in Shenzhen. That's why in Shenzhen children never go outside alone. In many places in China, in many cities, there is this problem. I feel it's very strange. When we were young, we could go alone through the city, by ourselves. We never though it was dangerous, but now it has changed".* (25)

Conclusion

Shenzhen has many large-scale public facilities such as parks, playgrounds and squares which are widely used. The most popular public places are malls and large-scale public facilities including playgrounds, parks and squares and children's centres. At these sites children play with other children, by themselves or with a family member. They take part in entertainment, fly kites or play with toys, often those that are sold on site. Parents that are interested in out-doors activities take their children to climb the mountain and parents who are interested in educating their children take them to the bookstore. Children are never in public places by themselves. They are always joined by an adult, either a parent, grandparent or nanny. Within the gardens where they live, children use some of the facilities that are there, but often their parents take them outside of the garden for leisure or to spend time outdoors. High-rise gardens seem particularly suitable for younger children under the age of 6 or 7, once children get older there are few interesting places inside the complex besides the swimming pool or tennis court. The large scale of Shenzhen in general and that of it public places in particular poses challenges to observing activities in public space. At the same time, the scale of these facilities also means that children and parents do not often meet people they know. They also do not often get to meet new people. The parochial realm is hard to find, as the city is too big and social networks are too new or constantly shifting.

5. 'Enjoy the Life'- Parental values and practices

What are the parenting values and practices of Chinese middle-class parents in Shenzhen?

5.1 Active involvement to ensure success in life

All of the parents who were interviewed were actively involved in their children's lives and devoted to their well-being, success and happiness. Many mothers decide to quit their job and stay at home when their child is born. They feel that it is important that parents devote time to the upbringing of their child. Some mothers start working again when the child is in kindergarten or elementary school, other mothers decide to not return to work. None of the families that participated in the interview had a stay-at-home-dad. All parents who were employed worked full-time, it was very rare to have a part-time job, something which seemed to be possible only when the parent worked for a family company.

> *"I finished my honours in New-Zealand in accounting after a bachelor with business. But I do now nothing with it. I got pregnant after I finished university so I stopped working and had my first child. I stopped breastfeeding after nine months and then I was actually ready to work again when I found out that I was pregnant again".* (#1)

> *"When I was pregnant of my first child and I stopped. It seemed important to stop and take care of the baby so I stopped. I like to work so my husband said I could go to work when my child could go to the kindergarten but then I got pregnant of the second one".* (#2)

Almost all of the parents that were interviewed made very conscious decisions about the upbringing of their children. They think about the different activities their child can participate in, the importance of family time and the different skills and values they want their children to learn and how. The mother of a 9-year-old boy who takes calligraphy, piano, chess and architecture classes explains that she and her husband are very mindful about the decisions they make for their son. While her son is listening to a lecture by a famous Chinese architect and she explains why she and her husband decided to send their son to these architecture workshops. Her explanation shows their devotion and desire to be involved:

> *"First, me and my husband made this decision for our son. Then, the purpose of our decision was to make our son see the city from another angle, another perspective. This workshop is different from other extra-curricular classes. They don't have only theory lessons, but they make hand-made products by themselves as well. They think it's very interesting and useful. Last year was an elementary class, but this year is a more advanced class. Last year for the certificate or graduation of the elementary class they went to community and designed some chairs and community equipment for the whole community".* (#21)

Some parents try out several different training centres before finding one that is suitable for their children's training and education. They have very clear ideas of the skills and knowledge they want teachers, tutors and coaches to teach their children and which teaching and training methods are the best or most suitable. Parents go through great lengths to find what they believe their child needs.

"My wife chose the violin teacher and she's very serious. She changed several times. I think that different teachers have different teaching styles. Some are good for her, some are not. Before we try, we don't know. This is her fourth teacher". (#12)

The mother of a 4-year-old boy is also very involved in her son's activities and devotes a lot of her time, energy and attention to her son's development. She decided to enrol her son in piano lessons based on a method requiring intensive child-parent interaction to achieve the skills that children are expected to accomplish:

"He likes to play piano so I required him to do in the week some practices. Every week I practice with him three times and each time an half hour". (#23)

5.2 Ideas, hopes and expectations

"Enjoy the life"
When parents were asked about the most important value, goal or expectation they had for their children, often the answer was a simple 'enjoy the life'. This was a typical Chinese translation of a phrase mentioned by several parents, and came up in interviews translated by different translators. This phrase captures a sentiment that is felt by many, if not all, of the parents that were interviewed. Different parents said here that happiness, and not success, it the most important objective.

"I wants to let my child grow up happily and not put too much pressure. Just to live a normal life and I don't expect my child to be successful but just to be happy". (#23)

"I hope my child will be happy. Happiness is very important". (#4)

In addition to emphasizing the importance of their child's happiness, several parents note how much they value family time and spending time with their children. One father in particular strongly expresses this belief and his anecdote is a perfect illustration:

"I am very busy every day. This means that after work, I just want to spend some time with my family. I really want to spend time with my family members and my child after my work. Today, one of my friends sent a message to me. It said, in life, you just have little time to spend with your children. This time is very, very important for me. I must spend this time with my child. When my son grows up, he will go away, which means that I want to spend a lot of time with them while they're young. They might study in another city, or they might study abroad, so I think now is a very important time for us spend with my child". (#4)

Educational attainment
Apart from wanting their child living a happy life, several parents indicate that they find it important for their children to perform well in school and enrol their children in different classes or hire private tutors. They want their children to obtain high grades and apply for good secondary schools and universities. Obtaining high grades is particularly important after elementary school, when school placement becomes more competitive. Entry exams for high-school applications are required and acceptance in to one of the better high-schools in one's district requires high scores. Not all parents share these ideas, some parents indicate that they do not have a very clear image of their children's future and other say that educational

achievements are not relevant. A father of a 4–year-old daughter has clear ideas about what kind of education he expects his daughter to have:

> *"It's best when she gets a bachelor degree in the future. That's what I expect from my daughter (…). Because my daughter can only survive in society when she gets a bachelor degree. Because in China, more and more people get a very high education, which means that my daughter also needs a bachelor degree".* (#6)

A common theme mentioned by several parents when discussing the education of their children was sending their children abroad to finish their education or applying for universities abroad. In most cases parents want their children to study abroad because they are not satisfied with the Chinese education system. They feel that it is too competitive or that their children will not be taught the most important skills and knowledge, which involve personal development rather than just academic skills and achievements.

> *"I want her to go to university abroad (…). Europe, America or Australia. The education there is better than in China. I don't like the Chinese style. It's only about learning knowledge, just a specific form to get a high score for exams".* (#16)

> *"If it is possible, I want to send my daughter abroad to study, and then I will go with her. It depends on the opportunities (…), New Zealand or Sydney. We have this plan, but we don't know if it will happen (…). The education system in China is not so good. They just want students to learn to copy information in their examinations. They just want students to pass exams, it's not about their real growth and real education. It's not about their mental development".* (#14)

A father who has a four-year-old daughter, is certain that his daughter will go to university. Although he says happiness is important, he and his wife have also thought about his daughter's future and what kind of education that would like her to have. Like several other parents, he and his wife intend to move to another country as a family or join his daughter when she leaves the country for university:

> *"If we have more money and a better economic condition, maybe we can consider the option of going to another country to have a different education. But the most likely option is that she stays in Shenzhen. We don't have plans for her whole life, just being happy is enough (…). If we have the ability, I think Cananda, Australia or the U.S. or another English-speaking country is the best for us (…). They can more easily accommodate us, it's in their culture, they are more open, in my opinion".* (#15)

Self-making, self-actualization and important life skills and lessons
Developing individual interests, opinions and skills and finding a personality independent from family and friends is a theme that is reflected in many accounts. It is important for parents that their children learn how to express themselves and find out what they enjoy doing. Parents consider how their children might be able to achieve this and how their own decisions will help in this process.

> *"I want my daughter to join a cultural class, like music, dance or calligraphy. But not academic classes, like English, Chinese or Math, these kind of classes (…). These cultural classes will influence my daughter her entire life, but academic classes will just influence my daughter in the short run. Because cultural classes will influence her mind. Like music or drawing will influence her mind, she will know beautiful things. It will influence her way of thinking and the way she expresses herself. But academic classes will just influence her for a short period of time".* (#7)

"I want them to do all kind of different things. It is really important to find what they are really interested in and what they want to do when they grow up. If they focus on one thing they will be narrow minded". (#1)

Many parents mention that they want their child to become independent individuals, meaning that they will be capable of making decisions on their own and be able to deal with challenges and problems by themselves.

I hope that his character will be independent so he can decide want he wants. I hope he will have a happy life, he must have the right attitude for the life and has to have his own way of thinking". (#23)

"I am not expecting my child to be a top students and have high scores. I want my child to be healthy mentally and also physically. That he acquires responsibility and when he fails or faces some problems he can solve it by himself". (#36)

"My wife and I think that our child should make his own decisions and that we should give him freedom. I can ask him to take this route and hope he will like this route. But if he doesn't like it, he will choose another route". (#3)

Taking children to different places and letting them take part in different activities and classes is often motivated by a belief that this will help children develop themselves as individuals. Another reason given by several parents is that they want their children to have a variety of skills and knowledge of different disciplines and facets of live. 'Broadening their horizon' is a phrase that is expressed several times as one of the most important goals or values that parents have. A father of two daughters tells us that he likes taking his children to the area of the Children's palace. He regularly takes his children here and has been to all the different facilities. He explains why he thinks it is important to take his children to these cultural places:

"Very convenient. There is a book centre, library, museum and a concert hall (…).To broaden the horizon of my children (…). There is an old saying in Chinese that means, going to many places is very important, more important than reading many books". (#33)

A couple of parents specifically address the value of traveling and explain why they think it is important to travel, see different places and have different experiences:

"It depends, but we like to travel to places we have never been before (…) Because traveling allows us to broaden our horizon, that's why we want our daughter to go to many different places, to broaden our horizon (…). It's very important that she broadens her horizon, because even if you've read a lot of books, you still need to go out and learn something by experiencing it. The essence of learning is that it's best to go through it by yourself". (#14)

"Next week I will one week off, a holiday. I booked a ticket and am taking my child on vacation in China. I want my child to open his eyes and experience new things". (#3)

"It is important for children to see the outside world and experience a lot. Maybe we can't see much of the instant effect of what the children have learned but it is very important for their future". (#19)

Very few parents expressed their thoughts about their child's social capabilities and relationships. Only one parent articulated her belief that children should play with other children and friends in order to develop themselves as social beings. She emphasizes the

importance of developing social skills and explains why she values this over academic skills and knowledge:

> *"I think that activities like going out with friends are very important for my son. He can play together with our friend's sons and cultivate him to build up his characteristics. I don't believe that those knowledge related activities like mathematics are that important. It is important to help my son and build his social behaviour".* (#35)

5.3 Developing special talents and competition

Throughout the study it became apparent that it is very common in Shenzhen for parents to send their children to many extra-curricular activities, classes and tutoring - a trend of which most parents seem to be aware.

> *"Yes! Maybe almost all families send their children to piano, dance and painting classes (…). One reason is that the children like it. Another reason is that everyone does it, it seems to be popular to do something like that. It's a common thing to do".* (#15)

Several questions were asked about the popularity of this phenomenon and personal reasons and motivations for having children take part in all these activities. Many of the answers were related to children developing special talents and skills. Apart from parents being invested in the individual goals and values they have for their children, they also explain this as a result of pressure coming from the education system and competition between students. Although many parents emphasize the importance of developing independent interests and the ability to enjoy their life, a sense of competition is frequently mentioned. One parent tells us why it is common in Shenzhen for children to take several different classes outside of school. His 8-year-old-daughter takes dance and piano lessons, and also plays a traditional Chinese instrument:

> *"Most of her classmates have extra classes like sports or piano.* [It is a] *very normal phenomenon. Most of the children have extra classes. Sometimes the teacher asks what can your children do except for instrument or sport. The parents believe that their own children should catch up with other children and have the extra classes".* (#29)

Another parent who has a five-year-old daughter tells us about the different extra-curricular activities his daughter participates in. His and his wife's motivations for sending their daughter to these classes are partly based on a sense of competition:

> *"I send her to piano lessons. She started last year. She is a beginner. She also really likes drawing, she takes drawing lessons as well. She also takes English lessons. We hired a neighbour to teach her English* [in a small group]*. She takes English lessons two nights a week, drawing lessons twice a week and piano lessons also twice a week (…). Because I think maybe other Chinese families also think like this (…). They want their children to be better than the other. Something like competition. In high school and university they also have English lessons, so if they learn early, it will be easier for them in the future".* (#5)

Several parents comment on this phenomenon in the context of Shenzhen and of the Chinese education system in general. In order for students to be accepted into the most desired schools, they do not only need to get decent grades, they are also expected to show talent in other non-academic areas.

"Yes. There are lots of training centres and lots of clubs (…). The thing is, here in China, if you want to go to a better school you need to get a high score and you need to be really good at the exam. If you want to make things easier, you have to have some special skill, like a sport or art, that kind of thing. When you are really good at this, some schools will accept you, even if your scores are not so high. That's why people want their children to have some special skill". (#19)

The expectations that the father has for his 5-year-old daughter are very similar to those mentioned by other parents. His daughter is enrolled in six different classes and activities outside of school. He is aware of the criticism he might receive and the pressure he might put on his daughter, but believes that it will positively affect her future:

"That she will have a brighter future but not necessarily something she is really good in. Just the ability to work and explore her own future and take care of her own life (…). I also talked to the family because I get a lot of opposition for sending her to all these classes. My daughter is still interested in it and she has no negative feeling to these classes. Physically her body can still stand it. These conditions are ok. Some of the classes are more demanding like dancing and piano but the art classes are more like playing. It also gives her the opportunity to learn a lot of children of different ages in different situations. She can develop social capabilities. Her classmates go to the zoo, the experience is similar but the activity is different". (#11)

A 36-year-old mother who works for a consulting company shares her experience with pressure to compete which she fears she or her 4-year-old son might feel when her son gets older. Unlike most of his classmates, he only takes chess lessons after school and is not enrolled in, for example, English or math classes. The mother reflects on Chinese society when we ask her about the pressure she feels as a parent for her son to become successful:

"I don't want him to give him more pressure to take another class. I know all the friends of his class and I think all his friends take extra classes, especially in the weekend. Sunday morning or afternoon, English or math classes (…). I discuss with him if he feels like he has some difference with the other classmates because they go to these extra classes. He said that up to now he can handle it and he doesn't need an extra class. Maybe two years later he will find some difficulties and maybe he will go to the extra class. This is the situation in China. Most of the family let their children go to extra classes (…). I hope I can protect him but I don't know (…). Most of my friends know the situation but have no choice. If you live in China, you can not avoid this kind of test style". (#10)

5.4 Conflicting values and expectations

A theme that is encountered in several of the interviews is having conflicting ideas and ideals about parenting, although this is never directly addressed by parents but can be observed by comparing different answers given by one parent in the same interview. Furthermore, based on the interviews and by looking at children's busy schedules, is appears that it is essential that children live up to their full potential and develop all kinds of skills and knowledge through after-school training, several other extra-curricular activities and by obtaining the best education and grades possible. Yet, parents also want their children to be happy and live full-filled lives as well-rounded, independent individuals. These two different kinds of goals and expectations sometimes seem to contrast each other although they are often articulated by one and the same parent.

There are a couple of accounts that illustrate these conflicting values and expectations. One example is a father who is asked about his expectations for his daughter. He explains:

"I want my daughter first to get a bachelor degree or a master degree (…). I want my daughter to get a stable job, like a doctor or a teacher. Not like people who own a business". (#8)

However, when asked what he views as the most important lessons and values he would like to teach his daughter, he is much less focused on achievement mentioned by him earlier in the interview:

"I just want my daughter to be happy. It's not about money or what kind of house she lives in. It's not about achievements, just about being happy". (#8)

Another father of a daughter of 4 years old first tells us that he does not want to force his daughter to study piano or dancing and that he doesn't expect his daughter to develop any specific interests or skills:

"Well, many parents like to do that, but we just let her play with her friends still and we don't expect her to develop some specific interests or skills. Not yet. In the future, maybe, but I need to find out what interests her. She is rather quiet. She can focus on drawing, it's easy for her to be quiet. I think it depends on a person's characteristics, so I will not force her to study piano or dancing". (#15)

To make sure that he is understood correctly, he is asked whether this means that his daughter does not take any classes at all. As it turns out, his daughter is enrolled in a private English programme at an organization recommended by a friend:

"She takes classes with EF education, it's close to us. There are foreigners to teach them English songs and do some training. I have a friend who works at EF in Nanshan". (#15)

5.5 Contrast with previous generations

Generational differences are a recurring theme when parenting values and practices were discussed with parents. Almost all participants pointed out the transition Chinese society went through and the impact this has had on people's mindsets and behaviour, including the way they raise their children.

"From that generation only a few people could enter college, and so their dream was to enter college. Therefore they wanted their children to go to college as well. That's why they thought - because this was their dream, right - that this is the biggest achievement for their children. But now, society has changed. I think that achievements are not decided by someone's educational background. There is a difference between generations. Because of the Open Door Policy in China during the last 20 years, the minds of the Chinese people changed a lot. Absolutely a lot. That's why they have a completely different mindset than their parents (…). Because China opened to the world and people changed their mind, so they also changed their minds about education". (#8)

When parents reflect on their own upbringing and childhood they either feel that they have been pushed too hard and were pressured to live up to very high standards, or they feel that their own parents were too busy making ends meet and did not pay enough attention to their children's performance and well-being. In both cases, this reflection and realization often guides their own parenting.

"It's a different philosophy. I think I'm lucky, because my parents spent a lot of their lives just on keeping the family alive. They had many children to feed and their education cost a lot of money. I have 5 brothers. At that time, Chinese families were usually like this. So it was terrible [laughs]*. My*

parents worked like cows, even worse. So, I don't want that many kids, it will damage your own life and their lives. It's a stupid thing to do. I think one important lesson for a human being is that we can learn from experience. No matter good experience or bad. If you've had any bad experiences, don't do it again. Some people say, you educate your daughter very well. Where did you learn that? I say, from my parents. They say, no, your parents didn't treat you like this. I say, it's reverse. I'm doing the opposite". (#12)

Many parents believe that the differences they experience between their parents and themselves is a common phenomenon in Shenzhen:

"This is common. There are differences between generations in terms of attitude and the way people raise their children. This is common in Shenzhen". (#14)

"I think in modern China there is some change. Before the Chinese families were very focused on reading and some tutorials. The modern China and especially Shenzhen, well-developed urban areas, the parents have widened their horizon. They try to balance the physical and mental development of the child. (#22)

Several parents felt pressured to accomplish the achievements that their parents expected from them. They were expected to be top of their class, get accepted into university and become successful professionals.

"At that time parents had a different way of thinking. Their educational background is different. My parents only went to high school. They had very high expectations for me, they wanted me have a high education and become a doctor. 20 years ago or 10 years ago it was very difficult to go to college. But today, it is very easy. I think at that time, there was only one route to enter college, by passing college examination. But now there are many different routes to enter college". (#4)

These parents feel that they should move away from their parents' point of view and parenting style. They view themselves as more liberal and should support their children in developing their own interests, talents and dreams, outside of education. A mother who sends her 9-year-old son to four different extra-curricular classes and activities explains why she thinks it is important that her son takes classes outside of school. She invests in cultivating her son's hobbies, in order for her son to learn how to express his feelings and enjoy his life. This is something that she felt lacked in her own upbringing:

"I took my son to these classes not for the achievement, but to express himself, his feelings and find a way to enjoy his life. You know, when we were young, we maybe had our own interests and hobbies, but our parents didn't know how to cultivate our hobbies. When we got older, we didn't find a way to express our feelings, maybe one day we want to sing, but our singing skills are not very good, and we are not brave enough to sing a song. This is just an example". (#20)

Other parents have had different experiences growing up in pre-reform China. They tell us that their parents were too busy earning money and providing food for the family to pay a lot of attention to their children's educational performances or development. Poverty determined the way children were raised. These parents take a different point of view and dedicate a lot of time and effort to their children's needs, wishes and development. Because they feel their upbringing lacked sufficient parental involvement in their school performance and personal development they emphasize the importance of good education and participation in extracurricular activities.

"Her ways to educate her children is quite different from her parents. When we were young, China was very poor and the parents had to work and were very busy. They have no time to care about us.

My parents didn't have any education ideas. Now she designs the future for her kid and spends more time to think about the future, how to get a better one". (#9)

"Our parents they just made sure we had enough food and they didn't care so much about the education. But now, for our son, we don't need to worry about having enough food so we care more about that he does things that he likes to do". (#17)

"My parents were poorer and now, we are not as poor (…). They were peasants, farmers (…). The situation and the life of my daughter changed a lot. It was very hard for my parents to find enough food for the family. We used to live in poverty, but it has changed now. My daughter can live a good life and travel and take extra classes". (#14)

Although the majority of parents grew up in other cities elsewhere in China, several parents grew up in rural areas in peasant families. The comparison they draw between their own childhood and upbringing is most elaborate and the contrasts they depict and differences they experience are the most extreme. These parents now live in very luxurious residential gardens and are able to afford different kinds of domestic help and different kinds of extra-curricular classes for their children.

"We have extremely different childhoods. When I was young, there were no good clothes and not even enough food, not even enough rice. Everything was difficult, that's why I left my hometown and came here to work. For him, things are very different. When he was born, he drank good milk and ate good food. What he wears are famous brands. Everything is good; it's totally different (…) My parents only told me that when I came home from school, I should help with farm work, help weeding and watering the vegetables. It was all about farm work then, parents didn't care about your education or other things. You just had to help with their work. But now, he has to do nothing. Children now have to do nothing. All he has to do is help with the laundry, put his clothes near the washing machine, and sometimes help with cooking. Sometimes when we are too lazy to cook, we'll ask our son to do the cooking". (#19)

"When I grew up, I lived in the country side. At that time, it was just about having enough food and safety. When I was little, my parents were very busy, working to have enough food and safety and so on. Now that we moved to the city, we care more about our own. It's because every day, we have enough food. I also stay with my children to make sure that they're safe and now the education is more important. It's a different time. Maybe thirty years ago, people were still busy making sure they have enough food. When I was young, my parents sent me to school and just let me finish my education, they did not care about my good scores or whether I studied well or not. And now, I want my children to learn something else, not just the lessons in school, and know more about other things and enjoy the life". (#5)

Conclusion

Parents are actively involved in their children's lives and devoted to their well-being, success and happiness. Parents do not demonstrate detailed and though-out strategies, but nevertheless have clear ideas about their skills, knowledge and values their children should have and develop. Parents are very aware of the importance of their decisions and have specific goals and teaching methods in mind. Happiness is mentioned as the most important objective and parents note how much they value family time and spending time with their children. Several parents find it most important for their children to perform well in school, apply for good secondary schools and eventually go to university. Having little faith in the Chinese education system, several parents believe that sending their children abroad to finish their education or applying for universities abroad will serve their children best. Objectives related to self-making and self-

actualization are reflected in parents' wanting their children to developing individual interests, opinions and skills and finding a personality independent from family and friends. It is important for parents that their child learns how to express themselves and find out what they enjoy doing. Acquiring variety of skills and knowledge in different disciplines and learning about facets of life is another important goal and value. This is often expressed as 'broadening their horizon'. It is very common in Shenzhen for parents to send their children to many extra-curricular activities, classes and tutoring. This is not only because of the individual goals and values parents have for their children, but also because of pressure coming from the education system and competition between students. These conflicting ideas and ideals about parenting, parenthood and a child's upbringing appear often in parents answers. They want happiness and success for their child at the same time. Although parents often emphasize on happiness rather than achievement, they still send their children to classes and tutoring from a very young age. Parents are aware of their parenting style and reflect on their own upbringing and the way they were raised. Generational differences are a topic that parents are very eager to discuss and they view themselves as different or more modern than their own parents.

6. Nothing Is Typical - middle-class identity formation

How do parents shape and express their middle-class identity?

6.1 Moving to Shenzhen

In order to place the participants identity formation in to context it is necessary to find out more about why parents moved to Shenzhen. None of the parents that participated in the interviews were Shenzhen natives. They all moved to Shenzhen from different parts of Guangdong or different provinces in China. Some moved here to go to university, others moved here to find a job after graduation. A few parents moved here when they were teenagers, because they were unable to attend high-school or university and could not find a job in their hometown. These different reasons for moving to Shenzhen give an image of the goals participants had or have in life and helps reflect on how they view themselves and shape their identity.

Most of the parents indicated they came to Shenzhen to find a job. With an exploding population and government investing heavily in new facilities, there were ample jobs available for, for example, doctors and other government officers when they graduated:

> *"When I graduated from medical school, this hospital wanted the medical school to find good doctors. I was asked to come work for this hospital. I obtained my bachelor degree in Jinan city, which is in Shangdong province. After I graduated I came here. I got my master's degree at this hospital".* (#6)

Several of the participants were unable to find a job in nearby Guangzhou and continued looking in Shenzhen, where they were successful:

> *"I've lived here for about 8 years. I graduated from medical school and then moved to Shenzhen to work here (...). The medical school is very close to this city, it's in Guangzhou. Shenzhen is a modern city and I had more chance to become a doctor here".* (#3)

> *"In 2000. After I graduated from University. I moved to Shenzhen because I got a job here. I didn't find a good job in Guangzhou, so the opportunities in Shenzhen for me looked pretty good ".* (#5)

A couple of mothers came to Shenzhen motivated by reasons other than finding a good job. They were drawn by Shenzhen's clean environment, openness or modernity. They believed Shenzhen would be able to give them new impressions and experiences that were not accessible to them in their hometowns.

> *"[I wanted to go from] a small city to a big city. Like, the life there was not rich so I wanted to move to a city like Shanghai or Beijing (...). They have many cultural activities generally speaking, and the social mobility was less in that time (...). Relatively, the big cities have more opportunities, for example better jobs, more friends and the education in bigger cities is better. There was only one college in that small city". (#13)*

> *"When I went to college, I wanted to know more about the outside world and have a new experience. When I was very young my family told me that I should go out and see more things. This is why I decided to move to Shenzhen (...). My first priority was to go to Shanghai and I looked there for a*

job because I believed that Shanghai was more international. That year it was difficult to find a good job in Shanghai so I transferred to Shenzhen". (#18)

Many people come to Shenzhen not because they think it is a more modern or clean city, but because Shenzhen will offer them more opportunities at finding a job than they have in their hometown or province. These are not necessarily educated people; in fact, labourers with little or no form the majority of the massive influx of migrants that are attracted to Shenzhen. A mother of two sons, now a manager of a textile factory, tells us when and why she came to Shenzhen. Because she only finished Junior High School, she still felt like there would be more opportunities for her here in Shenzhen than in her hometown in Sichuan Province. She is one of the many low-skilled labourers who come to Shenzhen to escape from rural poverty in more interior provinces and her success story can be interpreted as the Shenzhen version of the American Dream:

> *"When I was 15 years old I moved to Shenzhen to work here. You know, in China, in rural areas children, especially girls, are sometimes not allowed to go to school for such a long time, because families are quite poor and can't afford to pay for her tuition (…). When I first came here I actually not allowed to work, but one of my friends helped me. The manager allowed me to work in an electrical factory, I cleaned radios".* (#19)

6.2 High-rise living – taste and status?
Residential gated projects or gardens are promoted as exclusive and attracting residents that show a certain kind of status. This is clearly reflected in an anecdote told by a 41-year-old mother who has two sons. She is from a more humble background than most of the participants and although having had very little education, she is very successful today.

> *"I always wanted to have a garden-like house. In about 2008 we found this place and we wanted to buy the house here. When I found out about this place, I was working. When I heard the price was quite suitable, I came here in a very casual dress. I didn't look so beautiful and the receptionist was not so friendly to me, she didn't even allow me to visit the place. I had to sneak into the garden and hung around, then I found out that it was a really good place and decided I wanted to live here. At first, the receptionist was not so friendly to me, but when I came the next day I decided to buy the place and surprised the people there".* (#19)

Some parents were drawn to their current high-rise complex by the aesthetics but did not contrast their taste with that of other people. Most parents told us that it the decision to move to a specific garden or neighbourhood was not guided by a particular interest in the kind of people that lived in this area. A very common response was that they do not care very much about what kind of neighbours they have.

> *"Before I moved here I didn't know who would live here. For me it is not so important who lives here. I seldom talk to them. Most people buy this apartment for themselves and have their own life and its good for family and individual".* (#4)

> *"Sometimes I hang out with my daughter's friends' parents and I think they are very nice people. They don't have the same jobs, but the same educational background (…). No, not the educational background* [is important]. *I just think that it's very convenient for my daughter and also convenient for myself. What kind of people live in my neighbourhood is not important for me".* (#6)

A 36-year-old architects tells us he did not think about his future neighbours when he and his wife decided to move to their current home with their 5-year-old daughter, although they did end up appreciating them in the end:

> *"It was not the first priority, the first priority was to have your own private space. When he moved to that he started really to enjoy the neighbourhood because the people there were really nice".* (#11)

Only one parent told us directly that one of the reasons she decided to move with her husband to her current home in a high-rise gated community because she thought the people that lived there would have good manners, which is something she appreciates:

> *"They also have a family and they are never single. A lot of people who work for the government and also some have their own business. Also some old people that buy it for themselves or their children bought it. It is quiet and fresh over here (…). If people are really loud or spitting on the floor I don't like that (…), this was also one of the reasons to move here".* (#4)

Parents did not say they were concerned with status, taste or distinction and very few comments and answers could be interpreted as such. They listed other motivations for moving to a particular neighbourhood, such as the proximity of a good school and work location:

> *"We moved here in 2005 (…). This building is better than the place where we lived before. The other one is older and not so modern (…). There is a school nearby. We went to many different real estate agencies and finally found out about this place, it's good because there is a school nearby. It is very convenient (…). We also went to other places but there was no school nearby, so its inconvenient".* (#4)

> *"Because it is near his work. The work he does is very hard, with overtime, so that is why he choose to live very near the company".* (#9)

Other emphasized the importance of having a safe environment for their child and family, which was explained both as having security and gates around the complex and safety of the building's construction:

> *"We moved here in 2009. We had kids, we needed a bigger place. We visited many places. One of my friends is a real estate agent. He recommended the place (…). Before, we visited some other places. The development company, the constructor of this garden is the biggest enterprise in China, so we have confidence in their quality and service. The environment, it's very close to the big mountain, it is very good for us".* (#15)

Shenzhen is generally viewed as a clean and green city, and parents value its location between the bay and mountains and very acceptable levels of pollution. Especially parents who lived further away from the centre of Shenzhen appreciated the environment. For them clean air, pleasant breezes and a quiet atmosphere were important factors that influenced their decisions to buy their current home in a high-rise complex.

> *"I like the environment. There are mountains and the sea is not far away from here. Yeah, I like that. The important thing I think is, I have children and I want a good environment (…). Here, the air is very fresh and it's not noisy. In Huangka, there are many cars and the highway was not very far away from my home. So, I think here it is quiet and the air is very good".* (#5)

6.3 Relationship to the other

Neighbours

Few parents show awareness of their own status or social class or awareness of their neighbours' status or class. Parents rarely independently draw a comparison between themselves and their neighbours. This type of information was not easily obtained and several different questions needed to be asked in order to find out more about how the parents perceive their neighbours or themselves with respect to their neighbours. Few parents were able and willing to paint a clear picture:

> *"Some of them have the same education level. Others are teachers, some are lower educated and are just employees in a company. It's mixed. When the compounds were built, they were built for government employees. Now, they've moved to other places and some rent a house from other people. That's what makes the compounds mixed".* (#6)

One father who is exceptionally open about his views and opinions and explains how he sees his neighbours and draws a comparison between his own family:

> *"We actually have two different types of neighbours. One half is very nice, well-educated and friendly. Same kind of people as us. We are good friends with them. My daughter likes them a lot. The other half is rich, but not nice. Some of them are uncertain government officers* [not to be trusted]*. They don't talk to you for years. Some people drive a military car all the time. They have special rights, don't pay parking fees. They drive in reverse direction, just like some kind of bad guy. So, we don't interact. We are different kind of people, but we live in the same community. We can't pick out our neighbours".* (#12)

None of the other parents shared experiences and opinions like these. Some did not understand the questions asking them to describe their neighbours and social and economic characteristics of their neighbourhood, others viewed this kind of information as private or irrelevant. One translator pointed out that asking people you do not know, such as your neighbours, about their income or education level is considered to be rude and intrusive.

Many parents cannot compare themselves to their neighbours because they know very little about them. They tell us that they do not pay attention to their neighbours or do not care very much about who lives in their neighbourhood. Often parents only know some of their neighbours through their children. The relationship they have with their neighbours is based on the connection between their children. Sometimes children go to the same school, kindergarten or training centre.

> *"Just a few people. My daughter's kindergarten is also located in the compound, so I know my daughter's friends' parents".* (#6)

> *"You know, in Shenzhen we don't know each other even if we live on the same floor. But now, we know the people that live on the same floor as us. And we have kids, so we also know some of the other children's parents. That's our relationship with them".* (#16)

> *"The relationship between neighbours is weak. Not only on the same floor. Neighbours on the same floor know each other, they are the same, families, because they have also a child (...). The connection is only children, maybe we know some general information about their work, jobs but not even the exact name of them. We name them by their children's name. We don't know the neighbours names".* (#13)

Few parents tell us they are close with their neighbours or know them well. A mother who lives in recently constructed a high-rise garden appreciates her current neighbours much more than her previous neighbours and has many friendly contacts inside the garden, something that appears to be exceptional.

> *"We get along well and are sort of friends. I know a lot of my neighbours, we go to each other's house when we have free time (...). It was different in my previous homes. I just communicated with my landlord. People there were from all kinds of different places and had different kinds of jobs. It's was quite complicated there so we didn't communicate with other people. Here it's easier (...). People here are more educated* [mannered, well-behaved]*, are honest and can be trusted, so we talk to them and become friends. Even sometimes when the children come home and didn't have their key, they would go to their neighbour's house".* (#19)

Other people in Shenzhen

Many of the parents do seem to have a very large social network in Shenzhen. Apart from colleagues they sometimes have friends from college or friends from their hometown who also moved to Shenzhen. Generally, the friends they have are also not Shenzhen natives and moved to Shenzhen over the last 10 years. Parents are sometimes friendly with their neighbours but they do not seem to be a part of a solid social circle or network and are only get together occasionally for casual activities, often related to their children. Fathers have more regular social contacts, especially when they play sports, such as badminton or tennis. Parents do not make clear comparisons between themselves and their friends. They do not appear to be very particular about what kind of education or jobs their friends have, although several parents do acknowledge that most of their friends are educated and have good, stable jobs just like themselves. When asked to describe their friends, parents usually portray them as parents who like to spend time with their children. Social and economic characteristics are hardly mentioned.

When asked to make a comparison between themselves and other parents and families in Shenzhen, parents generally point out that Shenzhen has a very large population and that comparisons are not easily made. The population is too diverse and it is impossible to make generalizations.

> *"I can't say I fell really in love with it, there are too many people. We don't have a sense of belonging; all the people are immigrants and not locals (...). There are many people in this city but their backgrounds vary a lot. It is not a piece of cake to find a sense of belonging".* (#13)

> *"I don't think there is a typical Shenzhen family. Shenzhen has 13 million people, nothing is typical"* (CK, #11).

Parents do reflect on other people in Shenzhen, but rarely draw comparisons. Too a certain extent they are aware of a general mind-set of other people in Shenzhen and comments about Shenzhen society often involved the level of modernity or open-mindedness population. Examples that are given include having different skills than previous generations, openness and feeling less of a connection to tradition.

> *"People in Shenzhen are more open-minded because they come from different parts of China.* (#1)*.*

> *"In Shenzhen I found that people usually have dinner outside of their homes, because people are losing their basic skills, such as cooking. Many people don't have time to learn that. When we were children, our parents had to know how to cook. But now, I see that many people don't know how to cook and they don't have any interest in that. They also don't have time. They don't care about making life interesting, but they care about making life successful".*

Other visitors of public places

As was explained in chapter 4, most parents and children do not know a lot of people in the audience of the places they visit. The crowd is too large and families visit a wide variety of different places. It was also said that parents and children focus on their own and do not interact with other members of the public. Some even say they do not like to meet new people and prefer to stay with their own. When parents are asked to describe other people in the public places they visit, they often remark that they are also young families and that the audience is very mixed. Some say the audience is too large to draw a comparison.

6.4 Goals and aspirations

Many parents experience a certain level of economic stability and their goals for the future often do not involve any drastic life changes. They are content with their current life and simply want to enjoy it with their family. They generally do not aspire to significantly increase their income or find a more prestigious job than they already have. A mother who is a professor of Sociology and has a daughter of six years old explains why she currently does not have any great expectations of the future. Her account illustrates how many parents describe their goals and aspirations:

> *"What a question! I believe that this topic should have been asked ten years ago. Now the situation is about family, work. I have a lot of work to do, it is good for me to balance work and family. Enjoy the present life, although there is not even much to enjoy because of the pressure of work. My job is important and I spent many years in school and if I would give up my job now it would really be a pity. The financial expectation for this job is not that high compared to people in finance (...). Chasing for money has not much significance now but for some people it is really important. We already made our basic living, like a house and a car".* (#13)

Parents generally expect to stay in Shenzhen, often even in their current home. Especially those parents who live in a newly-built high-rise complex seem to have made an investment for a life time and expect to continue to live their lives the way they gradually built it up over the years. Although their children might have their own plans, they will stay in Shenzhen in their current home.

> *"For the rest of my life (...) I plan to stay here. Maybe my children will leave and buy another house, but I will stay here".* (#19)

Parents are most articulate about expectations for their children, as was explained in the previous chapter. None of the parents mentioned they want their children to have a better life than they currently have. They emphasize education and individual and well-rounded development of their child. Self-actualization is an important element of the goals and aspirations parents have for their child.

6.5 Symbolic boundaries

Drawing symbolic boundaries is an important element of identity formation. Throughout the study and in most accounts of parents the most dominant form of symbolic boundary drawing was through parenting. Many parents compare their own views and parenting style to those of other parents and often they present themselves as being different, more modern and liberal than other parents.

Several parents describe other parents as overly ambitious and more traditional and contrast these with their own priorities regarding their children which do not involve success or achievement, as they merely focus on the happiness of their child. This contrast is often mentioned and shows awareness of other parenting views and practices and creates a narrative of personal parenting styles.

Several parents compared their values to those of other parents. One father tells us about the values he wants to teach his daughter and his expectations of her future and compares his parenting style to that of other Chinese families:

> *"I want my daughter to be honest, have integrity, be happy and healthy. These are more important than her study (…). What you learn of your family and also the values are more important (…). Not so many parents think in this way because in China the parents want their child to go to a good university and get a good job. Most families do not care so much about their values and development in this way".* (#18)

A parent of a six-year-old boy tells us she focusses on her son's social capabilities and communication skills and does not push her son too much, like other parents might do:

> *"For children it is important to live well in society. In China, parents take a lot of care of the children, they tell their child to do a lot of things. I don't think that is a good thing (…). That he can do something by himself, that is more important than high score for his study".* (#35)

Some parents refer to putting pressure on children and how they intend and attempt to not push their own child too much:

> *"In general I will support what they do as long as it is healthy and it is beneficial. I don't have these boundaries. Some parents don't want their children to be musicians or other things. They want them to do business when they'll grow up (…). They probably think it is most important to earn more money. Property prices are really high in China and everything is quite expensive in comparing to their salaries, so they have really high pressure to earn enough money and this results in pushing their children (…). They believe that music and drawing classes are for interest but not really helpful in their lives. I don't think that way, they can do whatever they like as long as it is not harming the society".* (#1)

> *"Other people might be more traditional, they want their children to be good at Chinese and English, these kind of things, so that it is very easy for them to pass college examinations. They take their children to Chinese and English classes to make their children become the best in their class, to enter high school and to enter college".* (#3)

Other parents reflect on their own parenting and point out that other parents might not be focussed on their child's happiness as much as they are. They do not believe that grades or success are the most important, as opposed to other parents:

> "Her classmates go often to model training, dancing but no football, haha. Drawing, performing - actually a lot. But I just want them to enjoy playing (…). Some people want their children to be famous or successful. But I just want them to be happy and healthy. Some other parents want them to be rich. It's different thinking". (#2)

> "I am quite open-minded, I let my son do whatever he wants (…). Some parents in China force their children to study harder and harder and get a high score. I believe that when I do so, my children might get better grades, but I didn't do so because I want my children to grow happy". (#19)

Conclusion

None of the parents that participated in the interviews were Shenzhen natives and had moved to Shenzhen from different parts of Guangdong or from other provinces. They moved here for a university education or to find a job after graduation. Other left their hometowns as teenagers, unable to attend high school or university and in search of a job not available to them in their hometown. According to the literature, high-rise residential compounds are a location for the new Chinese middle classes to display their taste and status, and in this way display social distinction through consumption. It was expected that parents' motivations for moving to a specific neighbourhood or garden could be interpreted as a sign of display of social distinction. However, few participants mentioned reasons or motivations that directly reflected an attempt to display taste or a pursuit of status or social distinction. Additionally, many of the participants knew very few of their neighbours and did not pay a great deal of attention to the people living in their tower, garden or neighbourhood when they decided to buy or rent their current home. Many of the parents do seem to have a very large social network in Shenzhen. They do not make clear comparisons between themselves and their friends and do not identify as being part of a specific social circle. Parents do reflect on other people in Shenzhen, but rarely draw comparisons. To a certain extent they are aware of a general mind-set of other people in Shenzhen and comments about Shenzhen society often involved the level of modernity or open-mindedness population. Many parents experience a certain level of economic stability and their goals for the future often do not involve any drastic life changes. They generally do not aspire to significantly increase their income or find a more prestigious job than they already have and expect to stay in Shenzhen, often even in their current home. They are the most articulate about expectations for their children, emphasizing happiness, education, self-actualization and independence. These goals and aspirations seem to both be based on ensuring a certain standard of living as well as a sense of security and trust in a stable future for their children. The most dominant form of symbolic boundary drawing was through parenting. Many parents compare their own views and parenting style to those of other parents and often they present themselves as being different, more modern and liberal than other parents. It was expected that parents are aware of their social status and base their decisions and parenting style on class-consciousness. However, parents are not aware of their social class and environment and do not define or present themselves as middle-class. Shenzhen has too large of a population to make comparisons between people and a definition of a typical Shenzhen parent or family is not easily explained. Parents do not identify with membership of or belonging to a specific social group.

Conclusion

The four sub questions were discussed and answered in the empirical chapters and help answer the main research question: *How do children living in high-rise neighbourhoods use public space and how is this related to the middle-class identity formation of their parents?*

Middle-class identity formation was expected to be expressed through different types of behaviour, consumption and choices. Consumption patterns that expressed an awareness of class and taste and a desire to achieve social distinction were rarely observed. Rather, middle class parents express their identity predominantly in terms of parenthood. Their self-identity is socially constructed through personal narrative about childhood, parenthood and upbringing which gives meaning to themselves and their relationships with others. A collective social identity is based on symbolic boundaries created through this personal narrative, which involves drawing comparisons between other parents and parenting styles. Parents view themselves as more modern and more liberal than other parents. They also emphasize their preference for a holistic approach to their child's upbringing, rather than merely focusing on academic achievements. Parents' personal narrative furthermore involves a comparison between their own upbringing and the way they raise their own children. Generational differences are part of how they view themselves in society and contribute to their identity as a modern parent.

Children of middle-class parents in Shenzhen rarely use public space alone and their activities and interactions are to a large extent determined by their parents. The physical structure and availability of public places suitable for children in Shenzhen also limits and determines children's activities, behaviour and interactions. There is a lack of or absence of parochial realm, as the scale of the city is too big, social interactions are rare or superficial and social networks are too new or constantly shifting. Lofland describes the city as providing a unique "social-psychological environment that is not duplicated elsewhere […] The city provides, on a permanent basis, an environment composed importantly of persons who are personally unknown to one another – composed importantly of strangers" (Lofland, 1998, p. xi). This description could not be truer for middle-class Shenzhen, where individuals seem unaware of their social environment, have limited contact and connections with their neighbours and visit places where they are either highly unlikely or unwilling to meet other people.

It was expected that children of middle-class parents would use public space in way that reflects how parents view themselves and shape their own identity and of their family as a whole. As parents are actively involved in their children's everyday life, they were expected to have control over the places they go, the activities they take part in and the social relationships and networks they make. Parents are indeed the most important influence in their children's activities and where they go. However, unlike the analysis of the literature suggested, public space in Shenzhen is generally not a place is where individuals can express their identity through social interactions with others or by forming place-based networks. Children use public space in a family context and their parents pay little attention to the behaviour of others or to

the social interactions of their children with other children. The activities children participate in, such as ice-skating lessons, in public places like malls, are more relevant in their parents identity formation as they reflect the goals and aspirations parents have for their children. These activities are, however, not determined by place. Public space and the way children use it, therefore, does not appear to be the most relevant factor in the formation of parent's middle-class identity.

Reflecting on the fieldwork done in Shenzhen, the analysis and outcome of the research there are some elements that pose questions. These are related to the definition of middle class and the description or classification of the group of participants that was interviewed for the research. Which particular groups was actually interviewed? Do the participants really represent the new urban middle class of Shenzhen? It was mentioned by several participants and translators that Chinese people are sometimes hesitant to meet new people, especially foreigners, and are hesitant to share their opinion and stories about their lives. However, the parents that participated in the research were all willing to answer many questions about their daily lives, experiences, views and opinions. This is an important characteristic that all of the participants share. To say, therefore, that this group represents the new urban middle class of Shenzhen might therefore not be accurate or realistic. In any case, judging from their education level, jobs and goals and aspirations, this group can be seen as part of the middle class, forming a sub-group that perhaps is more open or internationally oriented. To gain a deeper understanding of the new middle classes in Shenzhen, further research could include a study of consumption patterns and other ways in which people draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and others. Such research would help to determine whether there is a strong class-awareness or class-consciousness, or even a perceived membership of a specific social group at all within an immensely diverse population.

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Appendix

Topic list and interview guide

<u>Introduction for volunteers</u>

Topic
Middle-class family life in Shenzhen: daily activities and identity in a rapidly changing urban environment.
What do you and your family do in your daily lives, how do your organizes your life in Shenzhen?
In a rapidly growing city with such a large, new population, how do you view and express yourselves?

I am researching middle-class families and family life in high-rise neighbourhoods in Shenzhen. I focus on children's use of public space and the social context and identity of the middle-class family in Shenzhen. What I would like to do is have an interview with parents of about half an hour about the daily activities of their children, the places they go in the city and their parents' motivations and reasons for these activities. This way, I hope to learn more about the views, expectations and goals parents have for their children. I would also like to know more about what their daily life looks like, how they experience living in Shenzhen and why they decided to move here. I am also interested in the people that they meet when they go to places with their children and I would also like to know more about their friends (job, education, where they live, interests, etc.). This way, I hope to learn more about how they live and develop as a family in a big and new city like Shenzhen and in a changing Chinese society.

Topic list for Interview
Topics discussed during the interview:
Family background: hometown, education, employment and moving to Shenzhen
Residence: neighbourhood, location choice, neighbours
Education of children
Extra-curricular (out-of-school) activities of children: sports, music, creative lessons, language lessons, tutoring, reasons for choosing these activities
Activities in public space: park, beach, playground, shopping mall, 'Children's Palace', interaction with other people in such places
Social circle: friends and neighbours (how well do you know them, how often do you seen them, similarities and differences between parents and friends)
Ideas about raising children: most important values, most important skills, expectations and goals
Future expectations: how long will you live in Shenzhen, what will you and your children be doing

<u>Topic list and Interview guide</u>

Personal characteristics and family background
Age
Hometown

Education
Job and education grandparents

Motivation for location choice
When did you move to Shenzhen? Why?
When did you move to current home?Why? (Motivations)
How did you find out about this project/garden/neighbourhood?
How well do you know your neighbors?
How would you describe the people that live in this compound?
Do you view yourself as one of them? Why or why not?
How important were the facilities available in the compound in your decision to move here?
Did you look at public space suitable for children in the neighbourhood?
Do your children like living in this neighbourhood?

Employment
Job, position
Work schedule
Job location
Transportation
Job and position spouse

Day-to-day weekly schedule
Can you describe your daily schedule in a week?
How do you organize/plan your activities?
Can you describe your hobbies, leisure time and cultural activities?
When, where and how often?
Modes of transport
Constraints

Childcare
Who takes care of your children when you are at work?
Is there anyone else who is helping you with your children or housekeeping?
How often, when, what do they do?
Do you grandparents take care of your children? Why or why not?
Do you have a nanny? Why or why not?

Education Children
Where do your children go to school?
Why there? Or why not somewhere else?
How did you find out about this school?
Do your children like going to this school?
Would you rather send them to a different school? Why or why not?

Extra-curricular activities
What kind of extra-curricular activities, such as sports, music lessons or tutoring, do your children participate in ?
Why?
How did you find out about these lessons?
How did you find out about this education, sport, arts centre?
Are there any other activities that you would like your children to participate in in the future? Why?
In your opinion, is it normal for children in Shenzhen to participate in these kind of extracurricular activities and lessons? Why or why not?

Use of public space
Could you describe the public places mentioned in earlier sections of the interview?
When, with whom and how often do you go?
Why do your children go here, why do you take your children here?
How often do other families join you?
How often do you meet up with other people?
How often do you see or know a lot of people that are there as well?
What kind of activities do your children do?
How would you describe the atmosphere, image, and ambience of the public places where you take your children?
How often do your children play with other children? Whom do they play with?
Are there places that your children prefer over others? Why?
Are there places that you prefer over others? Why?
Do you meet with other people or other parents? Whom do you meet?
How would you describe the target audience or main audience of the places that you go to with your children?
Do you feel like you belong to this group? Are they similar to you?
Are the people that come to this location one of the contributing factors that you come here?
How do you know about this place?
Do you talk to other parents about these places?

Parenting
What are the most important values and lessons that you would like to teach your children, or that you would like your children to learn in life?
What are the most important skills that you would like your children to develop?
How do the activities that your children take part in contribute to this?
How would you describe the influence that their friends and other people they meet might have on your children's values, ideas and skills?
Do your friends and family have similar ideas about raising their children? How would you describe the similarities and differences?
Do you ever discuss the upbringing or education of your children?
Is your children's life, lifestyle and upbringing different from that of your own childhood?
How would you describe the similarities and differences?
Is the way you raise your children different from the way your parents raised you? How and why?

Social circle
Do you have many friends in the city?
How would you describe them (job, education, children, interests)?
How many friends do you have with the same education as you?
Do you have many friends with little or no education?
Would you be friends with people who have little or no education?
Where do they live?
Where do they go? What kind of activities and places?
Do you also participate in these kinds of activities? Would you like to? Why or why not?
How would you describe the differences and similarities between you and your friends?
Do you ever discuss your children and the way you raise them?

Future
How long to you intend to stay here in this neighbourhood and in Shenzhen?
What kind of life do you expect to have in 10 or 20 years?
What kind of life do you expect your children to have in 10 or 20 years?