

Chan Kwok-bun *Editor*

# International Handbook of Chinese Families

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 Springer



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# Introduction: Hegemony, Universality and the Dialectics of “Being Chinese” and the Family

Chan Kwok-bun and Chan Nin

If sociology is to go beyond a facile journalistic descriptivism that, in enumerating a host of empirical phenomena generated by capital, tacitly endorses the perpetuation of this very regime by remaining within its transcendental horizon, it should formulate a theory capable of discerning radically heterogeneous alternatives to the existing world. To be worthy of these aspirations, it must perform an autocriticism of itself, deconstructing the imaginary that structures its modes of seeing and saying. It is our belief that it is only through the combined resources of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Hegelian dialectics, and Marxist political economy that this self-critique can be accomplished, following which we can begin to contemplate an exposure of sociology’s founding assumptions to its other—the openness of futurity itself. The status of this futurity is not that of Derridean eschatology and its messianic invocations of the “to-come” but that of another time that, while produced through the concerted efforts of engaged agents in the here and now, is irreducible to the coordinates of the existing temporal order. Taken literally, this seizure of the future is the “making” of time. We affirm that the political is precisely this splitting of the present moment into a now of homogeneous repetition (what Benjamin would call the “empty time” of life bereft of hope) and a now that ruptures time from

within, filling the present with the desires of tomorrow. We believe that this faith in a new world can only be grasped when we purge sociology of its constitutive fetish: society itself. When the “discontents” of capitalist civilization are no longer seen as so many “regional” problems demanding the attention of sociological “experts” (a euphemistic nomenclature for managerial bureaucrats) and antagonism is affirmed as society’s very condition of (im)possibility, we can better discern the possibilities that social conflict offers to transformative change. As such, this chapter is, at one and the same time, a methodological reflection as well as a critical interpretation of various papers in this collection. In fact, it would be foolhardy to separate the two—what we propose throughout this introduction is a certain mode of relating to texts and statements, one that, while making certain inroads toward a social theory that is adequate to the challenges of our time, espouses an intransigent fidelity to the political legacy of Marx.

## An Anecdote on the Family

I<sup>1</sup> remember being on a bus headed to Jardine’s Lookout, one of the many enclaves for the rich in Hong Kong. Naturally, the seats were populated with middle-aged executives coming home from

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<sup>1</sup>“T” here refers to the second author of this introductory chapter, Chan Nin.



work, many of whom were from elsewhere (I heard one woman speak what sounded like Thai to her well-coiffed, immaculately suited husband, while another spoke Dutch), their trilingual children, freshly dismissed from a day of classes at the international school, and the Filipino helpers who tend to their every caprice. As the bus pulled up to the penultimate stop, a lumbering hulk of a man, his heaving frame racked by exhaustion, stumbled haphazardly down the aisles, his eyes sweeping across the flanks of the bus in search of a seat. It seemed to me that the man was a foreman or a worker at one of the many construction lots populating the area—his shirt and his boots were caked with dirt, redolent of stale cigarette smoke and sweat. He was also engaged in an impassioned verbal joust on his cell phone, a conversation which had evidently incensed him so much that he was flailing his sun-bronzed arms about and barking into the mouthpiece. Curious, I switched my MP3 player off and proceeded to eavesdrop on this voluble giant, so incongruous among this ensemble of corporate cowboys, well-fed princelings, and tenured servants. The ambivalence that I felt toward what I heard is as revelatory as it is disquieting. The man was yelling at his child, reprimanding him for staying out late every evening after school instead of coming home to study for the next day. To the child's presumed rejoinder that he had no homework to do and that it was his inalienable right to play basketball or have dinner with his friends, the father promptly deluged his son with a furious torrent of verbiage, compounded of invective, admonition, and chastisement. Near the close of the conversation, the father began to collapse beneath the insupportable, mute weight of utter exasperation, and his martial tone gave way to a sort of plaintive pleading. He reminded his child that he had given him all that he asked for, that he had broken his back catering to his whims, and that he should do what's best for the family and study hard. This reprieve, this fleeting glimpse of vulnerability, was momentary. The father's shoulders, which had, for the briefest of moments, crumpled and shriveled into a shrunken slump, straightened out as he continued to subject his son to a protracted haranguing: "Don't get me angry, I'm warning

you! You'll see what happens when you get on my bad side, I'll throw you out on the streets! Do you want to be a beggar? Do you want to beg for food? Can you live without your father? Talk back and I'll beat you senseless!"

Though I suspect that a good many of the bus passengers were unable to understand the father's obloquy on a linguistic level, their discomfiture was plain to see. Loath as I am to admit it, I was just as embarrassed as my fellow passengers, with whom I felt an almost preternatural sense of kinship. Clearly, this man was a living affront to the moral conspiracy that we shared among us, the invisible web of proprieties that bound us together. In an instant that was as brief as it was revelatory, the affective and moral unity of a *class* was rendered palpable to all who participated in it. The sublimity of this moment can hardly be overstated—the cultural differences that divided me from the others scarcely seemed to matter in the face of this inexcusable monstrosity, this bogeyman from the basements of oblivion, the *authoritarian father*.

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## The Logic of Becoming

What Hegel draws attention to is the fact that actual Universality is not only the abstract content common to all particular cases, but also the 'negative' power of disrupting each particular content. The fact that the Subject is a Universal Being means that...I become 'universal' only through the violent effort of disengaging myself from the violent effort of disengaging myself from the particularity of my situation...Subjectivity and universality are thus strictly correlative: the dimension of universality becomes 'for itself' only through the 'individualist' negation of the particular context which forms the subject's specific background. (Zizek 1997, p. 222)

It is perhaps not so surprising that, concerned as they are with tracking the deformations exerted upon the Chinese family by globalization in its neoliberal incarnation, the chapters presented here in this handbook find it difficult to think the antagonisms that lacerate these families from within. We would like to put forth two rather vulgar hypotheses for why this is. First, sociology, as a field of study that borrows its methods from the

empirical sciences, is informed and limited at the outset by its paradigmatic object, society. The first article of faith for the sociologist, then, is that *society exists* as a neutral, common space shared by its citizens/inhabitants. As ridiculous as it may seem to those who regard this catechistical axiom as the *sine qua non* of social existence, we would like to demonstrate the implausibility of this belief by invoking Hegel’s doctrine of contradiction.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, this incapacity to treat antagonism is immanent to sociological method itself, which treats categorical entities, not singularities. What does this mean? Here, the distinction that Gilles Deleuze made between the molar and the molecular may be of help. Put simply, the molar is that which is represented as a homogeneous entity. Let us list a few examples: individual, man, woman, family, state, and nation. It is easy to see that these fully constituted bodies are synthetic *abstractions*, *symbols* that are exchangeable and comparable with other symbols in an analogical order of equivalence. Thus, it seems clear that an operation must be performed upon them to render them into functional unities. One of Kant’s most crucial philosophical gestures in his *Critique of Pure Reason* was to reveal the *invisible violence* exerted by the transcendental subject upon the sensory multiplicity that it synthesized. Keeping this in mind, we can raise the question: what do these molarities synthesize, and what do they abstract from? We would like to quote, at the risk of seeming arcane, a passage from Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) *A Thousand Plateaus* that will become clearer after the exposition that follows it: “In a way, we must start at the end: all becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is to proportion formal relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming: neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfils,

becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire.” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 300).

If we remember that becoming, in Hegel’s (2010) *Logic*, is the perpetual and simultaneous oscillation between being and nothing (the dynamic of being passing into nothing and of nothing passing into being), then we can see the way in which this restless movement gives the lie to any stable, reified entity, undermining it from the inside by exposing it to relentless change. In other words, Hegel anticipates Heidegger in proposing that being has an inextricable relationship with *time*, and this relationship is expressed in the dynamic of *becoming*. As we know, Hegel’s reconsideration of the relationship between temporality and ontology gave rise to the dialectical movement that characterizes the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. How, then, does a becoming, which is essentially molecular, *differentiate* itself from a molar form, destabilizing it? Why must we “start at the end”?

This thematic of the end that is taken for the beginning is, of course, a Nietzschean one. Nietzsche’s objection to the systems of Kant and Hegel—concerns that were already central to the polemics between Schelling and Fichte—lay in their commencement from the ground of the subject and its representations without explaining how the notion of the subject comes about in the first place.<sup>3</sup> From this vantage point, we can better appreciate the impetus of Deleuze and Guattari’s ethics of difference: “...becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is to proportion formal relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to

<sup>2</sup>Gillian Rose’s excellent book, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (2009), is an exemplary text in this regard.

<sup>3</sup>“The other idiosyncrasy of the philosophers is no less dangerous; it consists in confusing the last and the first. They place that which comes at the end—unfortunately! For it ought not to come at all!—namely the ‘highest concepts’, which means the most general, the emptiest concepts, the last smoke of evaporating reality, in the beginning, as the beginning... That which is last, thinnest and emptiest is put first as cause in itself, as *ens realissimum*.” (Nietzsche 1977, p. 37)

becoming: neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfils, becoming is to extract particles...”

It is important to note the wording of the second sentence here, all of which situate us in the *present*: “Starting from the forms one **has**, the subject one **is**...the functions one **fulfils**...” The suggestion here is that the “being” of these predicates are both an end and a beginning—they are ossified qualities that are *given* to sense, and becoming is the process that puts them in movement, extracting them from the inertia of being and exposing them to variation. The condition of possibility for this is the *separability* of that which becomes from its predicates.<sup>4</sup> This ontological condition will serve as one of the foundational premises of this introductory chapter.

So what does it mean to say that “becoming is the process of desire”? Understood in Lacanian terms, desire is the dramatic enactment of this dialectical process itself. For Lacan, desire is always the desire for desire itself, a self-perpetuating and metonymic movement that displaces itself from one object to another, without alighting upon any given object in a definitive fashion. Why does this happen, if not for an irremediable *lack-of-being*, a nothingness at the heart of human desire that engages in an endless endeavor to plug this void with a positive object? Thus, Lacan does not concern himself with the *object* of desire (removing his theory of desire from any naïve anthropology or biologism) so much as he does the *cause* of desire (the *petit objet a*), the impetus that generates this interminable slippage from

one object to the next. In a sense, we are always *within* the flux of desire, *between* one object and the next. Because there is no “natural” referent/object of desire, there is something profoundly *unnatural* about desire, which is by no means an unmediated, biological impulse intrinsic to human life. This seminal insight supplies us with a lens by which we will examine various chapters in this handbook.

Deleuze and Guattari, then, give both becoming and desire a Spinozistic/Nietzschean inflection by linking these notions with degrees of *intensity*: “Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfils, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness...” For Spinoza and Nietzsche, life is animated by an expressive, appetitive force (*conatus* in Spinoza, will-to-power in Nietzsche). Lest this chapter devolve into an excursus on the niceties of vitalism, it would suffice to note that *power*, as these two thinkers conceive it, is a power to *act*, a virtual potentiality that clamors to “vent” (in Nietzsche’s unparalleled figuration) and actualize itself. From this simple supposition, Nietzsche and Spinoza construct an elaborate theory of affectivity that is of tremendous ethical import: if power is a positive, auto-affective potentiality that exults in its own activity, delighting in its effective actualization, then anything that obtrudes upon or limits this actualization could have disastrous effects. Indeed, while Nietzsche insists that the will-to-power is characterized by an active search for physical obstacles (the better to prove its indomitability), he notes that the will-to-power can turn against itself, a self-limitation that culminates in sadness and *ressentiment*. In Nietzschean terms, this is the all-too-human transformation of unconditionally affirmative *activity* into *reactivity*—this is precisely the point of departure for Nietzsche’s grandiloquent polemics against “slave morality,” which takes perverse delight in a collective deprivation of the power to act (if I lack the temerity to act, I will make sure to enforce a prohibition on action upon others). We should note that while the libidinal economies of activity and reactivity are formally different (one

<sup>4</sup> We are willing to concede that such a suggestion seriously distorts the views expressed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which jettisons the very notion of *that which becomes* altogether. For Deleuze, there is simply no substance, no “being” that becomes, because there is *only becoming*. Every hypostatization of a “being” that *precedes* and undergoes this continuous metamorphosis is a fallacy, an all-too-human distortion of Deleuze’s primary metaphysical (monistic) claim: if becoming is all there is, then every invocation of a “being” that persists *beneath* the flux of becoming is a (distortive) consequence of becoming itself, an “image of thought” that paralyzes the affirmative movement of life.

is directed *outward* and is transformational, the other is directed *inward, toward oneself*, a point that Nietzsche makes clear in his discussions on clerical austerity and self-flagellation), both are expressions of the *same will*. We can say, then, that the will-to-power and its accompanying affects are at the very center of vitalist philosophy—if power is a potentiality that ceaselessly desires to realize and augment itself, *joy* is nothing other than an increase in the power to act, and *sadness* is nothing other than a *separation* from the power of acting. These distinctions are, in a sense, *both qualitative and quantitative*, in the same sense that, for Deleuze and Guattari, a quantitative shift in speed or temperature is also a movement between differential thresholds of intensity.

It is from this very point that we can begin to appreciate the incomparable contribution that Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze made to social theory, the effects of which have yet to register in many fields of enquiry. Foucault’s principal premise is that *power is not a property* that *belongs* to a given entity, emanating from a privileged site or center. Rather, it passes *between* the nodes that constitute an assemblage of power, all of which form so many relays in its circuitry. This conception of power owes itself to Nietzsche and Spinoza in the twin senses that we have indicated above: power’s ubiquity ensures that we are always *within* power (rather than wielding it as a property), participating in the manifold “power games” that constitute social space, though this does not exclude the fact that there are varying *degrees of potentiality* distributed among the various players of each “power game.” This is why, for Foucault as for Nietzsche, relations of power are also relations of force (forces acting upon others, repelling or compounding with them). This, we think, is how we should read Foucault’s notion of the *dispositif*—the *dispositif* as a material, discursive apparatus prescribes a certain (pre)disposition, and the endorsement of the social contract amounts to an unspoken assent to the relations of power that traverse and constitute your social being.

So, at the close of this lengthy digression, we can make the following statements:

1. Sociology, insofar as it deals with molar units and abstractions, apprehends the social in terms of generalities and empirical categories at the expense of molecular flows of desire, transversal subjectifications, and games of power operating between empirical actors.
2. In identifying social actors with their symbolic predicates (cultural, sexual, etc.), sociology dismisses the separability of the post-Cartesian subject from its predicates, a truth that globalization has made clearer than ever.

Our first statement hinges on the breakthrough of Marx, who (in true Hegelian fashion) made an unequivocal distinction between the “working class” (a denumerable and isolable entity in the empirical social field) and the “proletariat” (the mobile subjective front dedicated to the destruction of class society *tout court*). In Deleuzian terms, the “working class” is a molar representation, while the “proletariat” is a subjective becoming that cuts across class categorizations, creating a zone of indiscernibility composed of bourgeois intellectuals, progressive *lumpenproletariat*, and workers alike, all of whom forego their particular differences to participate in a *construction of the same*, an affirmation of the common. For readers of Gramsci, the construction of this fighting front is commonly referred to as *hegemony*. The difference between the working class and the proletariat, therefore, is between an abstract particularity and a concrete universality. It is with the aid of this Marxist paradigm that we will attempt to evaluate the political consequences of various chapters in this handbook.

Our second statement finds its primary coordinates in the theory of subjectivity developed by Jacques Lacan, whose major rejoinder to structuralist practice was that it endeavors, like every science, to “suture the subject,” to develop a theoretical space that would solve the problem of free will by banishing it to the realm of transcendental illusion. Structuralism attempted to vanquish the question of human agency altogether by reducing it to a cipher in a structural combinatory, a fungible element in a transcendental symbolic order. Lacan’s objection to this, broadly speaking, was that the symbolic is not the end of the story—every symbolic order is contingent, tied as it is to

the void of the real at its heart. In classical psychoanalytic terms, structuralism had washed its hands of the unconscious, locating it in a repetitive, systematic chain that reproduces itself despite the fancies of its human links. Jacques Lacan's reconsideration and heroic defense of human freedom, deployed in a sophisticated ontology of the "non-all," reminds us that language is not the unsurpassable limit of human experience—the subject as such is not reducible to the imaginary ego with all of its symbolic identifications. Through a brief and schematic presentation of Lacan's ontogenetic theory, we will show the necessity of psychoanalytic thought in a world confident in the infallibility of its technocratic order.

Syncretizing these two statements, we can better examine the overlap between them. If, as Marx had prophesied, capital is the universal corrosive that causes "all that's solid" to melt into air, precipitating a "universal unbinding" (Ray Brassier) of all solidary ties, then Alain Badiou is justified in saying that the conditions of capitalism touch upon a primordial ontological truth. In annihilating the ties that once bound the individual to a prescribed sociocultural horizon, capitalism inadvertently disclosed an ontological principle: "[This] is obviously the only thing we can and must welcome within Capital: it exposes the pure multiple as the foundation of presentation; it denounces every effect of One as a simple, precarious configuration; it dismisses the symbolic representations in which the bond found a semblance of being. That this destitution operates in the most complete barbarity must not conceal its properly *ontological* virtue." (Badiou 1999, pp. 56–57) Badiou's fundamental ontological claim is that, at the zero level of matter, there are only multiples of multiples. Being qua being can be expressed thus—prior to any recapitulative, synthesizing representation, there *are* nothing but unbound multiplicities. What capitalism reveals, through a continuous process of primitive accumulation (more on this later), is that the subject can always be expropriated from its predicative coordinates, reduced to bare life in search of subsistence (in other words, wage labor). It is from the abyss of this destitution that a thought

of universality emerges—we must never forget that "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."

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## The Sliding of the Signified: Subjectivity and Antagonism

Contradiction...is alone what drives, nay, what coerces, action. Therefore, without the contradiction, there would be no movement, no life, and no progress. There would only be eternal stoppage, a deathly slumber of all the forces. (Schelling 2007, p. 12)

A transition from unity to contradiction is incomprehensible. For how should what is in itself one, whole and perfect, be tempted, charmed and enticed to emerge out of this peace? (Schelling 2007, p. 12)

Were there only unity and everything were in peace, then, forsooth, nothing would want to stir itself and everything would sink into listlessness. (Schelling 2007, p. 90)

Let us begin with a postmodern doxa that is employed to good effect in a number of the chapters presented here in this handbook—molarities are split from within by conflictual differences, the polyvalent richness of which cannot be subsumed under the gray generalities of stereotypes. Sam Wong's theoretical essay "Researching Migrant Chinese Families in Hong Kong—Changing Perspectives and Methodologies" makes promising strides in that direction, and we can identify various areas of convergence with his line of thinking:

- (a) The incipient provincialism of Hong Kong locals, premised upon a paranoiac anxiety regarding Hong Kong sovereignty, incarnates itself in a "social foundation for the exclusion of new immigrants." Compounding matters is the fact that the immigrant body itself is internally divided by exclusions and prejudices (urbane Chinese from the city centers readily identify themselves with metropolitan life, discriminating against immigrants from the countryside, etc.). This is something that must be vigorously combated. How?
- (b) Wong, quoting Ku and Pun's (2004) "Remaking Citizenship in Hong Kong," offers an inspiring answer to this: "The notions of participation, rights, membership, belonging and difference are no longer abstract formal



concepts but sites of intense contestation... Citizenship is understood also as a lived practice by which agency, subjectivity and embodied struggles from below expand the space of participation and resistance. By engaging with concrete and everyday experiences, we highlight the notion of a lived citizenship that unfolds the subjective experiences of social exclusions along the lines of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and that contests and negotiates the meaning of state power, rights, laws and social participation."

- (c) What is this "meaning of state power"? Is the state the fixed addressee of all political action? In other words, is political action necessarily an appeal to the state, a reinforcement of its incontestable power? Is all political conflict *internal* to the parameters prescribed by the existing state? Is the Kantian–Hegelian dialectic between state and civil society the unsurpassable horizon of political activity? It is imperative that we reflect upon this question, lest we abandon the revolutionary legacy that has been bequeathed upon us by the twentieth century, a heritage that places this very dialectic in question. What the political legacy of the Left demonstrates is that radical politics operates through a process of radical *subtraction* from the auspices of the state and its mechanisms of representation—the commune is precisely the form of collective life that attempts to move beyond the confines of statist society. In this regard, the *telos* that Lenin supplied to communist activity, the "withering of the state," remains indispensable for popular political movements today, and its strident thrust conjoins Marx's last two theses on Feuerbach: "The standpoint of the old materialism is 'civil' society; the standpoint of the new is *human* society, or socialized humanity...The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it." [Marx, in Marx and Engels (1974, p. 30)]
- (d) To take our leave of this civil society-state dialectic is to announce our departure from an imaginary originating in liberalism—the

state as a site facilitating the distribution of goods, a space wherein private/particular interests are negotiated. Marx, as we know, fantasized about a state that would cease to concern itself with the exercise of domination, having renounced this traditional function in lieu of the "management of things." It seems to us that if, as we believe, the central axiom of democratic politics is *equality* and equality is a *universal* truth applicable to all without exception, then we should put idiosyncratic difference at the service of an elaboration of the *same*. A lengthy quote from Alain Badiou will be of immense help here:

Contemporary ethics kicks up a big fuss about 'cultural' differences. Its conception of the 'other' is informed mainly by these kinds of differences. Its great ideal is the peaceful coexistence of cultural, religious and national 'communities', the refusal of 'exclusion'. But what we must recognize is that these differences hold no thought, that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind, as obvious in the difference between me and my cousin from Lyon as it is between the Shi'ite community of Iraq and the fat cowboys of Texas...Against these trifling descriptions (of a reality that is both obvious and inconsistent in itself), genuine thought should affirm the following principle: since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that *which is not yet*, so differences are then precisely what truths depose, or render insignificant. No light is shed on any concrete situation by the notion of the 'recognition of the other'...Philosophically, if the other doesn't matter it is indeed because the difficulty lies on the side of the **Same. The Same, in effect, is not what is (i.e., the infinite multiplicity of differences) but what comes to be.** (Badiou 2001, pp. 26–27, emphasis ours)

A political construction is always a *becoming* that breaks out of the asphyxiating, self-satisfied enclosure of *being*. If being, in our multicultural, metropolitan world, is characterized by limitless plurality and difference, then the valorization of what is already self-evident to all is of little political consequence. We know, from Wong's chapter, that the sanctification of inviolable difference can also result in segregations, frontiers, and zones of exclusion. The problem lies in the creation of a one that does not obliterate difference, a hegemonic construction that would expose private differences to the transformative,

common power of a *shared project*. This is of inestimable importance if we are to reconsider the possibility of a collective form of politics that bids farewell to identity politics and “social movements.”

- (e) Descartes had already outlined the contours of modern subjectivity when he plumbed the bottomless depths of a self-reflexive subjectivity with no content besides its *capacity for thought*. In this way, Descartes anticipated the basic psychoanalytic insight that *thought, far from being a natural and instinctive capacity, arises from failure*—it is the inalienable incongruity between man and his world that leads him to speculate on an “originary,” transcendent sphere where this laceration would be healed (heaven, the Kantian sphere of noumena, a homogeneous community delivered from strife and conflict). In short, it is only when *things go wrong* in the (always-provisional) intercourse between man and his world, when a violent imbalance interrupts this precarious symbiosis, that thought comes in to “fill in the gaps” of this void. The very fact that Descartes was able to hypothesize the inexistence of all sensory evidence, including that of the subject *itself*, was proof of the ontological dehiscence that modernity would render transparent—the subject, when considered ontologically, is nothing other than this expulsion from its “ontic,” worldly background, the negativity that wrenches itself from the contingent coordinates of its sociocultural moorings. Similarly, in Kant, the transcendental subject is never given in empirical observation, being the preconditional unity that opens the very frame of perception as such. Heidegger’s analytic of the *Das Sein* as the “being-there” that is “thrown” into a determinate historical horizon extrapolates this thought of a subject that is not any determinate “thing,” that is not identifiable with any of its ontical predicates.

## Dialectics Contra Postmodernism

When we assume the vantage point of dialectics, the shortcomings of the “postmodern” critique become evident. Ngan notes in her chapter on the

long-established Australian-born Chinese that the Chinese in (not “of,” not yet) are embedded in complex relationships constructed along divisions of birthplace, language, gender, generation, occupation, politics, and religion. The word “Chinese” does not necessarily signify any unified position regarding ethnicity or identity. As such, there is really no single ethnicity or any one Chinese identity at all. There is not and never was a community we can call the Chinese community in Australia. Great diversity is found within the broad category of Australian Chinese through their different life experiences and ethnicities, and this diversity may partly explain why some individuals may see themselves as Chinese, yet others may feel the term is imposed on them by others. As such, Chinese identity is a negotiated and unstable assemblage of perceptions; nevertheless, as an essentialist construct, it has been critically significant in organizing notions of sameness and difference between out-group and in-group members.

Ngan quarrels with the postmodern theorists for their exultations in the limitless metamorphoses that “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000) has made possible for affluent and mobile white men and women. Tacitly invoking the Marxist concept of the “real abstraction,” she urges the theorists to work toward a nuanced reconsideration of identity. We must take this statement of hers literally (to the *letter*): “The fact is that ‘Chinese’ is real in giving meaning to everyday life—as there are millions of people in the world who would identify themselves as Chinese in one way or another, either voluntarily or impinged upon by others.”

In Lacanian terms, “Chinese” is a symbolic quilting point that weaves together a set of symbolic predicates, giving consistency and significance to “everyday life.” We must remember that the quilting point, as that which gives some provisional oneness to a symbolic field, is that which guarantees the presence of meaning *without* actually meaning anything in itself. It is, thus, an *empty* signifier that is ultimately tautological, a stopping-point that puts a halt to the incessant sliding of meaning. This, as we know, often leads to the illusion of there being some “hidden meaning,” some authentic richness that is behind it: when asked about what “Chineseness” involves, an

urbane Shanghainese man would perhaps respond with a clever evasion such as “Oh, I don’t know, I can’t explain it, you have to be *in* the culture to understand it; you can’t *explain* these things in plain speech, you have to *feel* it!” This response of an informant reported in Ngan and Chan’s (2012) study of Australian-born Chinese performing ethnicity multi-generationally reflects the hidden meaning of “being Chinese” to the same effect:

I am Chinese because by definition I am. My cultural roots are Chinese. If you ask me what country I come from, it’s Australia, but my cultural background is Chinese. That is by definition, but I consider myself as an ABC (Australian-born Chinese). If you are asking me what makes me think I am Chinese, I don’t know!

In other words, Chineseness is Chineseness, and the very failure to speak about it is taken as a guarantee of its sacred ineffability. Slavoj Žižek’s “ingenious” analyses of ideology [see his *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (2008)] and *The Plague of Fantasies* (2009) utilize this Lacanian insight to decrypt the obscurantist claims of modern advertising, which mobilizes this very emptiness to generate some sort of supplement to the advertised product, thereby baptizing it with a spectral halo. Think, for example, of an advertising slogan such as “This is it. This is the Real Thing,” which Žižek takes to indicate the workings of the quilting point as such. Also, when we evaluate symbolic subjectivations (in this case, the assumption of the predicate “Chinese”) from the point of view of *the political*, it makes all the difference whether this assumption is done “voluntarily or impinged upon by others.” This, we must add, is something that we have long been conscious of. Also of particular interest to us is that the problem with essentialist conceptions of identity is the tendency to posit *one identity* as the single cause that determines the total meaning of an individual’s experience.

What is hegemony? It would need to be coupled with a biting discussion of racism in Australia, which we can translate into our Lacanian–Marxist vocabulary. Here are four first-person accounts of discrimination, provided by Ngan’s informants and in Ngan and Chan’s (2012) study:

I was always aware that I was different because in primary school I was picked out all the time. You got all these Italians. They were migrants themselves...

You know little kids, they are very cruel, they call you ‘Ching Chong,’ slant eyes and so on. You look very different. But Italians don’t look all that different from Aussies. The Chinese were very different straight away and you got segregated. So I knew I was different from primary school onward.

Being Chinese was only a negative identification coz when we grew up in Ryde there were no Asians. All the migrants were Italian or Greeks. Most of them have now moved out. We were one of the few Chinese families. It was quite conspicuous. So you develop a negative identification. So you are Chinese because they call you Ching Chong Chinaman or something like this.

...when I was six years old or something...for a few months I would stand up in front of the mirror and I would try to give myself a crease above my eye and to try to be like everyone else at school and of course later found out it wasn’t going to work. It’s a very sad thing that I had to do that if you think about it!

I knew that I was different from other people because people would ask me, “Where are you from? What nationality are you?” and all that sort of thing. And I just used to take it for granted that I was Chinese, but when they used to ask me—they couldn’t tell what I was sometimes! I thought that was a bit queer, because I just automatically thought I was Chinese, but even last week somebody said, “You don’t look Chinese!” and I said “Oh, don’t I?” She was a lady from Beijing...When I went to Hong Kong in 1958 a Chinese man on the plane walked by and he said, “Are you Filipino?” He went through a lot of other nationalities because he didn’t know what I was and in the end I just said, “Sydney”... So, I think the best answer is to say you’re Australian with Chinese roots.

Here, we are given insight into the deformations that the symbolic exerts upon those who enter its dominion, the pound of flesh that it exacts from its faithful. We mentioned above that the subject does not have a free hand in giving form to the imaginary avatar that constitutes its ego. As Ngan has noted, an ego can be forced upon you, a prefabricated image fully equipped with all manner of symbolic transplants (predicates). The third quote demonstrates, in a rather tragic way, the Freudian maxim that “anatomy is destiny”—here, “ethnicity” (as a hegemonized symbolic quality) is a cruel fate that one cannot seem to escape. The last quote is highly revealing of the procedures of identitarian interpellation today, identificatory procedures that Deleuze and Guattari (2004, pp. 195–196) have called operators of “faciality”: “We are certainly not saying that



the face, the power of the face, engenders and explains social power. *Certain assemblages of power require the production of a face, others do not...* Primitives have the most human of heads, the most beautiful and the most spiritual, but they have no face and need none. The face is not a universal. It is not even that of the white man; it is White Man himself, with his broad white cheeks and the black hole of his eyes...Not a universal, but *facies totius universi...* (emphases ours).

When Foucault (1995) discusses the gradual shift from disciplinary procedures (confinement, corporeal punishment, and other obtrusive forms of correction) to strategies of control, he supplies an outline for the analysis of contemporary racism. Baudrillard's (2008) pithy observation that "the medium is the model" in postmodernity captures the crux of Foucault's argument perfectly: with the proliferation of all manner of tests, trials, and evaluations, power establishes a means by which it can measure and hierarchize deviations from a dominant model of normativity. Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) notion of the "face" can be seen as being directly correlative of this turn in Foucault's thinking, and the "soft racism" that it enforces is plainly demonstrated in our "multicultural" metropolises: is it not true that "multiculturalism" affirms the difference of the other as long as he/she accepts the ground rules of Western civility? Multiculturalism, in the last reckoning, amounts to nothing more than the reduction of cultural difference to a series of weak variations on liberal-democratic consensus, which polices the limits of political correctness and moral acceptability. This is precisely why the placid benignity of liberal-democratic "tolerance" can scarcely obscure the paternalistic condescension that it assumes toward all of its errant stepchildren—the other is tolerable insofar as he submits to the proprieties of our civilized life. This derision toward every form of dissent and heterogeneity finds its consummate expression in the "American way of life" that has become the operative logic of late capitalism. Hence, there is an element of truth in the former American government's denunciations of "undemocratic" peoples, likening them to delinquents that must be liberated from their self-destructive habits and initiated

into the ways of the free market. Thus, the operative maxim of our liberal-democratic market societies is: the other is alright insofar as he/she is more or less the same as myself. If Marxism continues to exert its claim as "the only living philosophy of our time" (Sartre), it is because it allows us to think this problematic of the same and the other, identity and difference in a world that would have us believe that it has resolved this tension for good.

We would do well to return to our earlier discussion on the logic of the "quilting point." We commend Ngan for her close attention to the ways in which the discourse of Chineseness is reproduced through internalization, as we tease out the symbolic relations that are constitutive of cultural identity. Ngan juxtaposes accounts of discrimination from without with familial impositions of identitarian predicates, showing that there is a certain homology between the two forms:

... even though I wouldn't mind my children marrying whoever, it would be nice if they could maintain their Chinese looks. Their cousins already look Australian, they are *looking that look* so people won't treat them as Chinese. If no one is going to *treat you as Chinese*, then you won't feel you are Chinese!

(Being Chinese is about)...having a family dinner where we all have rice together. With an Asian meal it has to be steamed up and everything put on there on the table and everyone sits down and eats together. To be able to go to a Chinese grocery store and know your sauces and to know how to stir fry and cook.

My parents are really into that Chinese festivals and rituals like *Ching Ming* but I do that out of respect. The actual rituals mean nothing to me, I didn't understand it, I still don't understand it but I can do the motions. It means something to someone in the family.

A few comments are in order apropos the last two quotes, which evoke Bourdieu's (1972) notion of the *habitus*, with its rhythms, rituals, and practices. The second quote, in particular, is reminiscent of the thought of Pascal (1966, p. 98), one of Bourdieu's foremost influences: "Belief is natural to the mind, and it is natural for the will to love: so much so that if valid objects be lacking they will necessarily attach themselves to false ones...For we must not misunderstand ourselves: we are as much machine as mind...The strongest and most

widely accepted proofs are provided by habit. Habit inclines the machine, and the machine carries the mind with it *even before the mind can consent*... It is habit (in the more general sense of custom) that makes men Turks and pagans, traders and soldiers, etc... We need to develop a simple faith which becomes a habit and which leads us to believe things, and inclines all our faculties in favor of belief, *so that without violence, without tricks, without argument, our soul absorbs it naturally*... Both parts of our nature must be made to act according to belief: the mind must be persuaded by reasons, which it is sufficient to have seen once in a lifetime, and the machine must be run in by forming it to habit, and by not allowing it to go into reverse.” (emphases ours) This is precisely why Pascal (1966, p. 93) offers the following advice to an unbeliever who, while skeptical of the spiritual truth of Catholic ceremonies, seeks repose in the Church: “You want to cure yourself of unbelief, and you ask for the remedy? Learn of those who have been fettered like yourself, but who have now staked all that they possess.... Follow the method by which they began, which was, to *behave as though they believed*, by taking holy water, having Masses said, etc. This will lead you naturally toward belief and will calm you... drive the beast out of you.”

So, while Pascal seems to suggest that man is a rational creature just as much as he is an unreflective, habitual one, this is really a ruse: Pascal is implicitly aware that the force of scientific reason unleashed by modernity and the Cartesian revolution, having emerged from the cloisters of faith, threatens to burst its theological chains asunder.

Because Pascal is so fearful of the eviscerating power of the real and the world-shattering anxiety that it produces in a subject that has lost its moorings in symbolic reality, he desperately attempts to mend the link between man and his erstwhile order (Catholicism) by tethering rationality to the taskmaster of habit. Pray, receive communion, and perform the Eucharistic rituals and *belief will come*, because when you submit yourself to these ceremonies, you already *believe despite yourself*. Why? Because, as Lacan tells us, you don’t need to believe “directly,” you can defer your belief to

an other, a “subject-supposed-to-believe.” It is *this* intersubjective dimension of belief that is totally missed by non-psychoanalytic theories that continue to move within the ambit of intentionality—in our disenchanted postmodern metropolises, we are all skeptics, yet many of us continue to “keep our traditions alive,” going through the motions of reproducing the supposed “authenticity” of our cultures while maintaining an ironic distanciation toward our own actions. What sustains this authenticity, when we clearly are barred access to it ourselves? The answer is that it exists somewhere “out there,” somewhere somebody *truly* believes in the essence of these perfunctory gestures, and we have to keep the charade going, foregoing our own lack of conviction so that we may act *as though* we believe. Pascal’s incisive point is that this second-order, reflexive belief (believing in the authenticity of the belief, even if we cannot participate in it directly), sustained by a mythical “somebody” that *truly believes*, is already an unequivocal triumph for *belief itself*. In reality, we *are* the somebodies that we hypothesize, since it is through this very mythical presumption that the belief is incarnated and transmitted. Žižek (2009) has constructed a remarkable neo-Althusserian theory of ideology on precisely this point—in the words of Marx, ideology can be simply expressed; thus, they do not know it, but they are doing it. In a remarkable “correction” of Althusser’s concept of ideological interpellation, Žižek asserts that the ironic distanciation that characterizes postmodern subjectivity is no proof of Althusser’s irrelevance—on the contrary, it is precisely when we dissociate what we do with what we believe that we are fully within the grip of ideology. As an example of this, Žižek gives the example of the self-avowed atheist who reads the daily horoscope with a cynical smirk, insisting that he does not take its prophecies seriously.

So, to return to Ngan’s chapter, we can now pose the following scandalous hypothesis: what if *nobody* really believes in the formal rituals that give some cultural “richness” of experience, some ineffable *je ne sais quoi* to the notion of “Chineseness”? What if the deferral of belief from one unbeliever to the next is grounded upon nothing beyond a presumption that cannot be

validated? The quote that we reproduce as follows is so apposite to our purposes that it almost reads like a textbook example of belief today. Let us read it *once more*:

My parents are really into that Chinese festivals and rituals like *Ching Ming* but I do that out of respect. The actual rituals mean nothing to me, I didn't understand it, I still don't understand it but I can do the motions. It means something to someone in the family.

Our point here is that custom is, as Pascal has shown us, precisely that which does not need to be understood, nor *believed* on an intellectual level.

### What Is Hegemonic Struggle?

So, having said all this, it would perhaps be fair to suppose that we are advocating the nullification of any cultural predicate whatsoever, in lieu of a real cosmopolitanism in which all imaginary differences are abolished. This is not at all what we have in mind. The extraordinary explosion of subjectivities and the demands that postmodernity have made possible are developments that we welcome. Additionally, you need only remember that we stated, some pages ago, that sometimes it makes all the difference whether an identity is treated as a natural property/predicate “belonging” to an exclusive group or if it is mobilized as a political category. In other words, we would like to know if symbolic identifications can have a *revolutionary usage*. To explain this, we need only return to Ngan's two exemplary quotes (Ngan and Chan 2012):

When people ask, ‘Where are you from?’ If I say ‘I am from Australia’ they will say ‘no, no, no’, then I say “Oh you mean I am Chinese” coz I look different?

You get more problems over there because obviously they look at your face. I remember when I studied French for a year there was an Italian student asking me where I came from and I said I'm from Australia. And she's like “You can't be from Australia, what's wrong with you?” and I said I was born in Australia. And I guess they can't understand why I would be calling myself Australian. This was about ten years ago. I have been back to Europe last year and things are not so bad now. And I had the same thing in England too

with these white South Africans, they were just crazy. They would be surprised that I could use a knife and fork! And it's like, “what are you talking about!” So people in other parts of the world find it very difficult to understand me. So they sort of label you. Even in Sydney, they immediately make a judgment like that. Unless they hear me speak, they think I'm a recent migrant. But once they hear you talk, they just speak to you normally. So it's quite funny!

The jarring effect of these two quotes lies in their implications for political praxis. To put it simply, there *is* something subversive about insisting upon one's right to lay claim to a certain predicate, to affirm that it is not the exclusive property of some enclosed community but a locus of conflict open to litigious contestation.

So, returning to Ngan, we can say that her reservations toward deconstructive exaltations of fluid, mobile identities are perfectly justified. As far as identity goes, some have the liberty to choose from a limitless smorgasbord of lifestyles and identifications, while others are bound to assigned predicates or relegated to inexistence altogether (immigrant workers, the poor, the elderly). At the same time, can we not say that this restless metamorphosis from one “identity” to the other testifies to a deeper ontological fissure, which prevents one from ever closing the gap between the negativity of the subject and the positive identifications that are grafted upon it? It is this pre-predicative dimension of the subject, this relentless negativity that Žižek can justifiably refer to as the Cartesian “subject before subjectivation,” an ontological insight that, having inaugurated modern philosophy as such, has been brought to its logical conclusion in our fully reflexivized societies, where concrete individuals are so many “floating signifiers” forming attachments that are ultimately soluble. Besides this, Laclau and Badiou have, in their own ways, highlighted the fact that the contemporary individual exists in a number of existential worlds simultaneously, that he/she is traversed by a number of subjectifying vectors that are not reducible to one another (I am a father, a factory worker, a Christian, Tunisian, married to a Senegalese woman, etc.). This is why, for these two thinkers, the theme of “class struggle” can no longer be

considered *the* privileged operator of political subjectivation—*any* of these vectors can lead to explosive political confrontations, and it is impossible to determine beforehand *which* of these identifications will become politicized in a given circumstance. The positive condition for politics in postmodernity, then, is a double one: not only is the subject constitutively “unhinged,” unbound from any fixed signification, the identifications that compose him/her are themselves “floating,” subject to political contestation and appropriation. Ranciere’s account of women in the French Revolution can be read in this light, as a struggle on two fronts: the significations of “woman” and “citizen,” exposing each to the other in order to transform both.

Let us now read several chapters in this handbook, which hinge upon the experiences of various minorities in contemporary China. While it must be said that these authors are well intentioned, exhibiting as they do a remarkable sensitivity for the discontents of China at the height of its “state capitalist” phase, the shortcomings of the authors’ respective disciplines were exposed in May 1968: “The practice of organizing capitalism creates a mass of contradictions; and for each particular case a sociologist is put to work. One studies juvenile delinquency, another racism, a third slums. Each seeks an explanation of his partial problem and elaborates a ‘theory’ proposing solutions to the limited conflict he is studying. Thus, while serving as a ‘watchdog’ our sociologist will at the same time make his contribution to the mosaic of sociological ‘theories’.” (Cohn-Bendit, quoted in Guerin, 1970, p. 117)

What we would like to propose is a radical sociology informed by a materialist dialectic, a Marxist analysis of ideology, and a theory of political subjectivity derived from Lacan. The dialectic is impossible without a presupposition of the *antagonism* that prevents the social from achieving a state of closure or equilibrium. A Marxist theory of ideology examines the ways in which this antagonism, the real that cannot be done away with, is displaced. Psychoanalysis, as a theory of ontogenesis that accounts for the very emergence of personal identity from an inchoate, undifferentiated mass of uncoordinated impulses,

insists that this antagonism is not simply a “sociological” one, a conflict between self-identical groups. This problem is pointed out in Ngan’s chapter: identities are “imposed upon” groups in a unilateral way, trapping the other in the petrifying gaze of the neocolonialist same.

The truth of this only goes halfway. Certainly, it keenly pinpoints the fact that our highly mobile, liquid world of speculative finance and jet-setting executives occludes the hideous reality of brutal exclusions, expropriations, and persistence of exploitative labor (sweatshops, paternalistic forms of labor in Hong Kong, various forms of outsourcing, and other regimes of work that rivet laborers in place, revealing that the mobile freedoms of today’s corporate nomads are built upon the enforced fixity of others). It is this unpleasant reality, which introduces a pronounced cleavage between the ascendant cadre of footloose executives and the shadowy, unseen realm of the sweatshop, that deflates postmodern paeans to the reign of “immaterial labor” and the supersession of material production:

On a more general level...one should again today make thematic the status of (*material*) *production* as opposed to participation in symbolic exchange... Is not this ‘repression’ of production [in theory] reflected within the sphere of production itself, in the guise of the division between the virtual/symbolic site of ‘creative’ planning-programming and its execution, its material realization, carried out more and more in Third World sweatshops, from Indonesia to Brazil to China? This division- on the one hand, pure ‘frictionless’ planning, carried out on research ‘campuses’ or in ‘abstract’ glass-covered corporate high-rises; on the other, the ‘invisible’ dirty execution, taken into account by the planners mostly in the guise of ‘environmental costs’ etc.- is more and more radical today- the two sides are often even geographically separated by thousands of miles. [Zizek, in Butler et al. (2000, pp. 129–130)]

We can see, then, that the supposed radicality of postmodernity must be qualified by sensitivity toward the deadlocks of modernity that it manages to *displace* (often geographically) and *obscure*. Perceptive Marxist theorists as varied as David Harvey, Kojin Karatani, Luc Boltanski, and Eve Chiapello have all called for a nuanced dialectical analysis that does away with a linear, stagist conception of history—which renders

itself prone to the naïvely vanguardist tendencies of postmodern theory—in order to identify the persistent presence of supposedly “archaic” forms of work and sociality in contemporary capitalism. It is only from this point of view that we can grasp the compatibility of capitalism—an essentially *amoral* (rather than *immoral*) drive to profit that must be extracted from every normative/moral horizon—with the most “primitive” practices. To think of capitalism as a *combinatory*, a spectrum of mobile, time-tested tactics that can be adapted to various situations is to untie the cord that binds thought to the humanitarian sentimentality that masquerades as political action today.

We can examine the widespread rise of housewifery and “domestic work” (helpers, cooks, housekeepers) over the last couple of decades, a trend that registers the effects of a comprehensive change in global economic policy. Evidence for this abounds in several chapters in this handbook: Guida Man’s examination on women’s experience in transnational Hong Kong and Yan Yu’s assessment of the effects that the liberalization of the market exerts on conjugality, as well as April Gu’s study on divorcees in Beijing. Yan Yu’s chapter is perhaps the most lucid exposition of this very point: “A computer software salesman expressed his concern of the traditional family model. He agreed that a wife’s disconnection with society would hurt her marital communication with her husband, but he also stressed that ‘if a woman stays at home her personality or temper may change. For example, when the husband gets home from work he’s too tired and exhausted to talk, but the wife feels like she finally has someone to talk to.’ Evidently, the husbands disliked the traditional model not because they were concerned about their wives’ financial independence but because they believed that model would negatively affect their own life quality and their freedom in a marriage would be diminished.” Guida Man’s chapter elaborates upon this point by linking the ascent of neoliberal economic policy—with its stripping of the welfare state, its guarantees of long-term contractual work, pensions, healthcare, and social services—to the forcible confinement of women to the domicile.

Naturally, much is made of the *anachronistic* nature of this atavistic regression to old-fashioned patriarchy, which cannot be easily reconciled with Mao’s insistence upon gender equality.

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## The Family, at Last

What is the point of this lengthy excursus? Shouldn’t we be speaking about the Chinese family? Two rather banal remarks should be made here: the study of the Chinese family must, at one and the same time, be rigorously attentive to socio-culturo-economic circumstances, while drawing out all of the interconnections that link local, situational conditions to a global totality. Postmodern space, far from being a terrain that tends toward flatness, is populated with heterogeneous multiplicities, a haphazard bricolage of differential space-times. This does not make it any less of a “world-system,” though the term “system” suggests an inertia that does not obtain in a radically uncertain world of risk: it is precisely through the flexible management, conjunction, and, if possible, *capitalization* of emergent differences and antagonisms that “order” is maintained.

This is precisely the point that Deleuze and Guattari (2004) make in their landmark theorization of deterritorializing/reterritorializing capital in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: integrated world capitalism must be conceived as an axiomatic, a set of formal coordinates that must be transposed, transplanted, and “translated” into determinate sociocultural contexts. Althusser has already given us the name for the conduit which mediates the “real” of unfettered capital through the “imaginary” of the sociocultural field: ideology. Lest we dismiss the centrality of ideology in the reproduction of capitalist life, let us take up Wendy Brown’s [in Agamben et al. (2011)] incredibly pertinent riddle apropos the rise of neoconservatism in contemporary America, one that is equally applicable to an increasingly bigoted Europe and a stridently nationalist China: “How does a rationality that is expressly amoral at the level of ends and means (neoliberalism) intersect with one that is expressly moral and regulatory (neoconservatism)? How does a project



that empties the world of meaning, that cheapens and deracinates life and openly exploits desire, intersect one centered on fixing and enforcing meanings, conserving certain ways of life, and repressing and regulating desire? How does support for governance modeled on the firm and a normative social fabric of self-interest marry or jostle against support for governance modeled on church authority and a normative social fabric of self-sacrifice and long-term filial loyalty, the very fabric shredded by unbridled capitalism?” How indeed! In the tradition of Marx, these questions concerning the manufacture of legitimacy for a patently meaningless and antisocial drive are not merely questions for social theorists or philosophers, they are questions *for capitalism itself*, questions that it must improvise answers for.

With this in mind, several elementary points can be made here, many of which are not satisfactorily addressed in many studies of the contemporary family:

- (a) Neoliberal capitalism, while sermonizing endlessly about the unlimited liberty of the sovereign narcissist, is not the dominion of the individual. For this to be so, the individual should be able to exert his will over forces, natural or otherwise, that attenuate or confine his power to act. In reality, neoliberalism unfetters the *objective* forces of the market by shattering the dykes that once contained them, leaving the foundering individual to do what he can to keep his head above the deluge.
- (b) At the same time, the hollow simulacra of *individual choice* is not simply a delusion, it is the ideological cornerstone of the entire neoliberal edifice: witness the violent Occidental attack against the *hijab*, which is interpreted by the Western gaze as a symbol of barbarous patriarchal oppression. It has also undermined all hitherto nonconsensual, “coercive” relations that were constitutive of traditional society: patriarchy and relationships between parents and children, the young and their elders, and teachers and students. As we have seen in the anecdote of the unfortunate father, the discomfiting pathos of his plaintive plea to his son lies in the dwindling of his symbolic efficacy: he demands recognition from a son who can no longer grant it, having ceased to believe in the omnipotence of the patriarch.
- (c) In a sense, we can speak of the becoming-child of the working man or woman in neoliberalism, insofar as we associate the child with vulnerability, dependency, and haplessness. Subjected to the protean tempests of finance and the schizophrenic caprices of the job market, today’s “precariat” stumbles from temporary contract to temporary contract, inhabiting a Kafkaesque nightmare where every millisecond is to be employed productively (in expanding one’s network, in boosting one’s “employability” through the acquisition of all manner of intangible skills and knowledge, in impressing one’s superiors through ostentatious displays of initiative and conscientiousness), and every moment is lived on the brink of the precipice that hangs over the gulf of unemployment.
- (d) “Flexibility” and “mobility” are not quite as emancipatory as managerial literature and postindustrial sociologists would have us think, nor is neoliberalism’s explicit valorization of “creativity” a sign of its libertarian turn. Rather, as Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) have shown us in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, these are the categorical imperatives of cognitive capitalism, absolute injunctions that must be observed if one is to advance in life. De-skilling, re-skilling, constant movement from place to place, switching from one line of work to another throughout one’s lifetime, endless training programs, and flexible working hours that collapses the difference between work and leisure time, coupled with a consummate *personalization* of work, transforming one’s qualitative attributes into a quantum of *human capital*, life has become a protracted *performance test*, a perpetual examination monitored by one’s prospective employers. Gone are the days when one could look forward to a lifelong “career” in a single firm, replete with retirement benefits and the like—today one must be prepared to be put to the test at any given moment. This is precisely

what Foucault meant when he spoke of the passing of the disciplinary society, the Althusserian topos striated by institutional boundaries, and the advent of the control society, where discipline is internalized, subjectivized, and transformed into *self-discipline*. It is in this sense that we are already *within* the panopticon, where every gesture is performed beneath the gaze of the boss, whose approbation and disapprobation is a matter of life and death.

- (e) “Flexibility” and “mobility” have different valences across classes. To be sure, it can be immensely liberating for the so-called creative classes, the cognoscenti of cognitive capitalism—they can do freelance graphic design work in the morning and moonlight as a Thai masseuse while taking astral projection classes and raw food cooking lessons. It is this permissive, worldly wise, uprooted, and urbane class that has come into such sharp conflict with the urban working class of yesteryear, as can be seen in America where the disenfranchised workers of former industrial powerhouses have seen the outsourcing of work elsewhere and the ascendancy of “liberal,” post-civil rights movement discourse in governmental policy, leading to a redistribution of resources to blacks, homosexuals, etc.
- (f) It is within the family that we witness a profound clash between conflicting temporalities and values, between the savage caprices of the market and the idyll of the familial hearth. Fisher (2009), in his compact and stirring *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, puts this very well: “The values that family life depend upon—obligation, trustworthiness, commitment—are precisely those which are held to be obsolete in the new capitalism. Yet, with the public sphere under attack and the safety nets that a ‘Nanny State’ used to provide being dismantled, the family becomes an increasingly important place of respite in which instability is a constant. The situation of the family in post-Fordist capitalism is contradictory, in precisely the way that traditional Marxism expected: capitalism requires the family (as an essential means of reproduc-

ing and caring for labor power; as a salve for the psychic wounds inflicted by anarchic socio-economic conditions), even as it undermines it (denying parents time with children, putting intolerable stress on couples as they become the exclusive source of affective consolation for each other).” (Fisher, pp. 32–33) Here, one is reminded of Hobsbawm’s pithy aphorism on human beings being unfit for a capitalist mode of production, a paraphrase of Marx’s famous point that capitalists would, if it were at all possible, pay for living labor with air. One of the most curious things about capitalism is that labor struggles, and not the purported beneficence of capitalists and state functionaries, have continuously saved capital from its self-destructive, implosive excesses. To give the most obvious example, one which has been reiterated over and over again throughout Marxist history, the twentieth century was shaped by revolutionary socialism and the capitalist reaction-formations that formed bulwarks against it (nationalist populism, national socialism, the welfare state). Now that such buffers have been smashed and the labor–capital pact has been retrenched across the world, neoliberalism finds itself in the unenviable position of attempting to stimulate the effective demand of families sunk in debt and penury. Besides this, one would not need a sociologist to tell us that the reality that Fisher describes is painfully evident to most mothers and fathers, whose affective relationships with their family are being undermined by overwork; rising health, rent, and education costs; precarization; and the like, all of which could be compounded by longstanding racial and sexual discrimination. And what of romantic love, crushed beneath the “intolerable stress on couples as they become the exclusive source of affective consolation for each other”? Is it not that, with the teeming market of “chick-lit” novels and “chick-flick” films growing by the minute, the romantic couple has become the last oasis of affective authenticity in the quicksand of uncertainty, the last, strangled scream of a vanishing sociality?

- (g) It is imperative, then, to qualify “feminist” suggestions that the woman’s entry into the workplace should be celebrated, as per Marx’s wonderfully ambivalent suggestion that “how-ever terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system may appear...by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes.” [Marx, in Marx and Engels (1974, p. 314)] As with all of Marx’s formulations about the creative-destructive, corrosive powers of capital, this statement must be taken *dialectically* if it is to be understood at all. For example, it is certainly true that a family in which both spouses work (or, more crucially, *have the ability and option to*) is an absolute precondition for gender equality. If, however, we are not lulled by right-wing assurances that sexual equality will be another “trickle-down” benefit of the free market and insist upon its unconditional enforcement in the here and now, any suggestion that misogyny and patriarchy are crumbling must be subjected to serious scrutiny. First, to what degree is a dual-wage family in which husband and wife work a conscious *choice* assented to by both parties, and to what degree is it a *coercive necessity* imposed upon them by rising living costs and the precipitous decline of the family wage (the “breadwinner” wage of the twentieth century)? Second, how are women represented in various sectors, and what salary differentials are there between men and women? What sociocultural antagonisms emerge as a consequence of inter-gender competition between men and women, competition that is exacerbated by the disappearance of the male industrial worker, whose pride and self-sufficiency have been undermined?
- (h) Here, one can say something about the organization of work in our time, a regime that is characterized by what Nina Power (2009) has called the “feminization of labor” as well

as the “laborization of women”: “When people talk about the ‘feminization of labor’, then, their discourse is often double-edged. The phrase is at once descriptive (work is generally more precarious and communication-based, as women’s jobs tended to be in the past) and an expression of resentment (‘women have stolen proper men’s jobs! It’s their fault—somehow—that we don’t have any proper industry anymore!’) There are more women in work, and work itself has become more ‘female’...Alternatively, we could turn this around and talk about the laborization of women—the way in which females are cast as worker first and only secondarily as mother or wife, or any other identity position not linked with economic productivity.” (Power, p. 20) Here, we are thrust back into Marx’s stinging *Critique of the Gotha Program*, which takes capitalist (and, by extension, “state capitalist”/socialist) societies to task for grasping individuals “from one *definite* side only, for instance, in the present case, are regarded *only as workers* and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored.” (Marx, p. 23) Neoliberalism’s clever gambit, however, is to play both sides at once. In the eyes of an employer, the female worker is definitely a neutered, genderless worker *as well as* a woman. This is to say: a woman is a worker under law, and a woman for all of the informal purposes and requirements of the market. How is this so? Nina Power supplies an answer here: “Obviously neither the feminization of labor nor the laborization of women are total phenomena, nor complete. The glorious world of work stumbles on various obstacles: pregnancy age, lack of education, desperation (particularly of migrant and illegal workers, the nannies and cleaners who work so that richer women can do the same). The job market *continues to differentiate between men and women- the most blatant is the surprisingly resilient pay differential for the same jobs, and the predominance of women in part-time and badly-paid jobs.*” (Power, 2009, p. 20) So, one might say that



this paradox can be resolved in a classically Marxist way by reference to the *Critique of the Gotha Program*—juridically (formally) the woman is on equal footing with the man, but *equal formal rights* are the legal expression of *real inequality*. Communist law would decree something entirely different: the only just law is one that recognizes the rights of difference, the rights, we might say, of the unequal, of those who have special needs and demands from society.

- (i) To close, we would like to return to the figure which opened this introductory chapter, that of the anachronistic father. We are left, at the end, with a series of questions. Now that the “paternal function” has been rendered defunct and the Oedipus complex has been declared null and void, what can we make of parent–child relationships in contemporary society? What of those who occupy that nebulous void between the past and the future, struggling to accommodate to an emergent value structure? Are all of the trademarks of classical patriarchy (the authoritarian father, the docile housewife, the terrorized child) vanishing across class and cultural boundaries, or have they been rendered “functional” in the reproduction of capitalist relations? How about those revivals of “atavistic” norms and beliefs which act as a *response* to liberal–democratic hegemony and capitalist domination? What is the relationship between domestic and gender violence and neoliberalism? Is it not true that certain parts of the world have seen a violent recrudescence of violent patriarchy (e.g., Al-Qaeda-run Afghanistan), as an expression of male resentment against a legacy of humiliation at the hands of “decadent” Western imperialism? What sorts of ideological displacements are made possible by the foreclosure of socialist alternatives, the blockage of the political imagination, the suppression of “class struggle” as a political concept, and the disappearance of the “proletarian” as a militant agent/identification, all of which result in reactionary outbursts of all sorts? And since all of these questions relate to psychoanalysis in some oblique way, is it not crucial that we treat the libidinal economy

of neoliberal capital with the same seriousness as its political economy? Mark Fisher is forthright on this point and its implications for the contemporary family: “The problem is that late capitalism insists and relies upon the very equation of desire with interests that parenting used to be based on rejecting. In a culture in which the ‘paternal’ concept of duty has been subsumed into the ‘maternal’ imperative to enjoy, it can seem that the parent is *failing* in their duty if they in any way impede the children’s absolute right to enjoyment. Partly this is an effect of the increasing requirement that both parents work; in these conditions, when the parent sees the child very little, the tendency will often be to refuse to occupy the ‘oppressive’ function of telling the child what to do. The parental disavowal of this role is doubled at the level of cultural production by the refusal of ‘gatekeepers’ to do anything but give audiences what they already (appear to) want. The concrete question is: if a return to the paternal superego— the stern father in the home, Reithian superciliousness in broadcasting—is neither possible nor desirable, then how are we to move beyond the culture of monotonous moribund conformity that results from a refusal to challenge or educate?” (Fisher, 2009, pp. 71–72)

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## Part I

### Mobility and Family

# A Family Affair: Migration, Dispersal and the Emergent Identity of the Chinese Cosmopolitan

2

Chan Kwok-bun

Migration often disperses family members, thus massively ‘manufacturing’ a familial form often viewed by family specialists as pathological. This view is especially common among those who take it for granted that the family as a unit must be based on family members being physically together—in order to articulate their family life *in one physical place*, under the same roof (Cheal 1993; Bernades 1993). To the practitioner in marital counselling, family therapy, social work, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis, as well as to those providing pastoral care through various religious institutions or the mass media, family dispersal is usually evidence of family disorganization, and needs to be corrected.

Yet, when one looks beyond these narrow concerns and scrutinizes the classical and contemporary migration literature with special reference to the *actual* processual workings of the family, one notices that family dispersal often, if not always, coexists with migration; there is evidence of family dispersal having been accepted, anticipated, and seized upon as a rational strategy to optimize the benefits of migration while minimizing its risks and costs. Stark’s (1995) portfolio investment theory is among several attempts (see Fawcett 1989; DeJong et al. 1986; Perez 1986) to place the family at the heart of the migration decision—to place analyses of migration within the context of the family.

Stark (1995, p. 103) argues that when family members migrate from a rural to an urban area, usually as the result of a collective decision, the family is ‘simultaneously sampling from a number of separate markets (that is, investing in one without completely liquidating and shifting holdings from another), and sharing both costs (e.g., financing the move) and rewards (e.g. through remittances), and so forth’. Families disperse their labour resources over geographically scattered and qualitatively different markets in order to both reduce risks and pool and share their incomes. Support, in the form of remittances, flows to that sector of the family that stays home and deals with, say, crop failure; but remittances can also go to the urban migrant during times of economic recession. All this, of course, is contingent upon the migrant

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(the son or daughter)<sup>1</sup> and the family (represented by the father) entering into a co-insurance contract, a form of diversified portfolio investment, in which the command of the family over the migrant is secure, if not guaranteed. As such, family dispersal is not simply a ‘consequence’ of migration; on the contrary, the acceptance, anticipation, and adoption of family dispersal as strategy releases, sets in motion, and precedes the very act of migration in the first place.

Of course, family dispersal as migration strategy is not without its costs, strains, and stresses; the family sociologist is thus by necessity as interested in its problematic character as in its attendant coping strategies (Chan 1994). Yet, as this chapter argues, the scattering of family in a duality or, increasingly, a plurality of geographic places within a new, enabling global environment provides one crucial context within which a *Chinese cosmopolitan* identity emerges and is articulated. Other relevant contexts include the development of a system of intimately intertwined world economies with multidirectional flows of trade and investment; the emergence of a Chinese diasporic economy with its ethnically structured networks of nodes and poles (see Lever-Tracy and Ip 1996); and modern technological advances in communications and transport that facilitate the transmission of popular culture (Cohen 1994). Together, these conflicts and conditions further enhance the effectiveness and viability of familial dispersal as an intermediary strategy of transnational migration and, in turn, of Chinese cosmopolitanism. Correspondingly, the phenomenology and anthropology of this new, emergent Chinese identity necessitates a re-think of such issues as traditional versus modern Chinese culture; culture loss versus culture gain; and assimilation versus the persistence of ethnic

consciousness. Speaking sociologically and historically, the contemporary ‘astronaut families’ (a term I will explicate later in the chapter) of Hong Kong are best seen as a *variant, not deviant*, family form—or, simply, as a migration strategy, a positive act, long noted in the migratory history of mankind, although they are now much more mobile, resource-rich, and resilient than their nineteenth-century predecessors. As a group or class, the resulting diaspora is constituted by what are variously called the ‘transilients’ (Richmond 1995), the new overseas Chinese (Skeldon 1994a), or the new middle-class Chinese (Li 1983).

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## Migration and Family Dispersal in History

As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was massive movement across the Atlantic of male migrants from old Europe—who left their spouses, children, and extended families behind—into the brave new world of America to seek better opportunities and new fortunes. This migratory movement intensified in 1845–1850, then again in 1880 and onwards, and captured the attention of sociologists decades later. Thomas and Znaniecki’s (1918–1920a, b) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, partly based on content analysis of letters exchanged between husbands and wives and between family members across the Atlantic, is a classic in the genre of migration studies. Handlin’s (1953) *The Uprooted* is another. In these two texts, marital separation and family dispersal as forms of social disorganization and alienation were salient themes. As a social phenomenon, the dispersal of families in disparate geographic places as a result of migration was long noted in the migration literature, but by and large it was looked upon negatively, as an undesirable consequence.

China in the nineteenth century was a distressed society. Among the push factors associated with the massive emigration of the Chinese, the demographic and economic ones were the most prominent: a failing economy, tenant exploitation by landlords, overpopulation, shortage of

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I use ‘he’ most of the time in reference to the migrant or immigrant, partly because international migration of the Chinese in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was, of necessity, almost wholly a male phenomenon. I acknowledge the recent appearance of women as members of the *new* overseas Chinese. I avoid the usage of ‘he or she’ because I consider it a cumbersome expression that achieves very little gender neutrality.

basic food staples, inflation, gross social insecurity, natural calamities, and civil wars. News and rumours about the proliferation of opportunities in America had also begun to seize the imagination of many potential Chinese emigrants. The discovery of gold at John Sutter's Mill along the Sacramento River in 1848 set into place a tumultuous 'pull' that induced a worldwide migratory movement. Between 1848 and 1852, there was an influx of up to 25,000 male migrants from China's Pearl River delta region into the west coast of the United States and, later in 1858, into Canada's Fraser River Valley—migratory men crossed the Pacific to partake in the so-called Gold Fever, and later to work as manual labourers, building roads and railways or working in various other burgeoning industries (Chan 1991).<sup>2</sup> Lacking passage money and uncertain about their own fortune in America, the migrants left their wives and children (when they had any) behind in the Chinese villages. The more fortunate ones managed to make occasional trips back home, staying in China only long enough (typically one to two years or only months) to father children and renew kin ties, while others continued to send home letters (most of which they did not write themselves

because of their illiteracy) with remittances to keep their family and marital ties alive. Letter writing and sending remittances home<sup>3</sup> were gestures of family solidarity, a means of ensuring one's continued role and integration into the patrilineal family and kin network, a way of sharing rewards with others to ensure the collective well-being of the family. Most of the time, the husband-fathers played out their roles and discharged their responsibilities, however inadequately, *at a distance*. They eked out their migrant labourers' existence in a 'male bachelor society', often finding themselves vulnerable to the so-called ethnic vices (Chan 1991)—gambling, opium addiction, visiting prostitutes, and so on—long noted in the social science as well as literary texts dealing with overseas Chinese males.

Throughout the early 1900s, Chinese migrants in the United States and Canada were often unfairly caricatured and stereotyped in the mass media, accused of 'vices' that emerged precisely because they were denied the rights to bring over their women and families. The sexual orientation and behaviour of the Chinese male migrant was often portrayed by the media in extremes; the Chinese male was either sexless or oversexed, and he was viewed as abnormal or pathological. The myriad of clan- and occupation-related associations in the Chinatown area acted as 'surrogate' or substitute families for many migrant persons, whose sexual relief continued to be found among non-Chinese prostitutes elsewhere.

On 6 May 1882, US President Chester A. Arthur signed into law the Exclusion Act—the first of what was to become a series of acts and policies aimed at excluding Chinese from American immigration. The Act prohibited the importation of Chinese skilled and unskilled labour into the United States and was not repealed until 1943, 61 years later. In Canada, the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 levied a head tax of \$50 on almost every Chinese upon entry into the host country; this was increased to \$100 in 1900 and

<sup>2</sup>In this chapter, I focus on the historical and contemporary experiences of the Chinese migrants and immigrants to Canada and the United States for three reasons. First, I am most familiar with these two experiences, having studied them and lived in Canada for close to two decades. Second, the Chinese experiences in Canada and the United States have close chronological and political parallels. In fact, they are best seen as two closely related histories—a scholarly analysis of which is yet to be attempted. Third, the bulk of the theoretical and empirical literature on the experience of the ethnic Chinese overseas I draw upon for this chapter is Canadian- and American-based. I am, of course, fully aware of the limits of generalizability of my analyses to ethnic Chinese elsewhere. For me, the degree of fit between theory, experience, and data is considerable and attractive. The 'astronaut families' of Hong Kong were chosen as a *case* illustrative of modern-day dispersed families among the ethnic Chinese overseas. Many such families are made up of the resource-rich, hypermobile 'transilients' I attempt to delineate in this chapter. Not at all coincidentally, Canada, the United States, and Australia are their favourite countries of adoption. Hong Kong has lately been under the watchful eye of the world. The sheer magnitude of its emigration compels me to examine the 'astronaut families' thus created.

<sup>3</sup>These remittances were usually sent through the occasional returning migrants or through one of the many brokering agencies set up by Chinese merchants or family and clan associations in Chinatown districts.

\$500 in 1903, culminating in the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, which ‘fortified’ the male bachelor society earlier immigration had created while further institutionalizing marital separation and family dispersal among the Chinese. What had started out as a partly purposive and partly involuntary migration strategy soon became an institutionally imposed course of action. The Canadian Chinese Immigration Act was not repealed until 1947, at which point many Chinese families were reunited and many wives were brought into Canada, often after decades of marital separation. Wives had to look after husbands who were aging and, often, also frail, weak, and sick, if not dying (Chan 1991).

### The Family and Its Role in Migration

The social science literature on migration in general has long noted, though not often explicitly enough, that both migration and, invariably, the explicit policies of the host governments and their recruiting brokers *select* young, strong, able-bodied males and launch them on long-distance voyages. The demand in a rapidly developing host society is for foreign migrants to provide a constant supply of dependable cheap labour. Looked at micro-sociologically, the family selects strong, able-bodied males as ‘target migrants’ to undertake the precarious journeys of migration to further the fortunes of the family left behind, to ensure its survival and continuing well-being.

In *Stepping Out*, a study I co-authored with the Chinese business pioneers who came to Singapore in the 1920s, often penniless, having left poverty-stricken villages in Southern China, we noted the same process of migration in general, and pertaining to the family–kin group in particular. Poverty required that the process of decision-making about migration be undertaken cautiously and collectively, with the participation and consent of the elderly members of the family and kin network. Mothers and wives often played a crucial role in arranging for the passage money through loans from the larger family–kin group; as such, *women* left back home had considerable

say in who was to migrate, when, how, and to where (Chan and Chiang 1994). The group deliberated, selected the ‘target migrants’, launching them on a sojourn overseas, and forced the paradox of separating and dispersing the family in order to ensure its continuity, prosperity, and the hoped-for eventual re-unification. Some member of the family, whether the husband or the male child, had to be sent away to make good for both himself and the family, to keep the functionally deficient family from falling further apart. The family’s role must be foregrounded in the migration process. In a sense, the extended family collects and releases the migration inertia energy; the elders borrow money from kin, neighbours, friends, and acquaintances to pay for passage, make transactions with migration brokering agencies stationed in China, locate and utilize sources of contact in targeted countries of destination. The family plans and plays an instrumental role in each and every stage of decision-making before, during, and after the departure of the target migrant. Ultimately, while it is the lone individual who moves, physically speaking, it is the family that is active, that constitutes, articulates, negotiates both with the micro and domestic groups and with the macro, socio-economic, and political forces in both country of departure and country of arrival. Migration is a family affair, a business of the family, too important to be left to the individual himself.

The more contemporary migration literature has not been negligent in foregrounding the saliency of the family in terms of its role in the internal as well as external dynamics of the migration process. In her review, Boyd (1989) characterizes the family, understood in its broadest sense as a set of personal networks or linkages, as an essential strategic constituent element of the international migration system (Fawcett 1989; Fawcett and Arnold 1987; DeJong et al. 1986; Perez 1986). Methodologically and substantively speaking, the family mediates or ‘intervenes’ between individual migrants (as actors) and larger, structural, transnational forces (to which the actors are subjected); it also connects the personal-individual, the ‘micro’, with the structural, ‘macro’, and



global levels of analyses; properly viewed, *the family also increases the explanatory power of theories about the motivation to migrate*. Finally, the family connects the forces responsible for migration in countries of departure and arrival. In addition, once the dispersed family as a system of networks and linkages is in place globally and becomes fully operational, subsequent flows of migrants are set in motion to join the pioneers or 'family predecessors' because the opportunity structure and all the other necessary supportive and facilitative infrastructures are by now in place: hence the unfolding of 'chain migration'. As Fawcett puts it, 'family relationships have an *enduring* impact on migrants. Policies, rules and norms may change, but obligations among family members are of *an abiding nature*' (1989, p.678).

The foregrounding of the family points to the paradox underpinning the 'individual' migrant's situation. For the Chinese individuals involved, migration continues to be family-initiated and family-sponsored, and this fact has deep, far-reaching psychological and moral consequences for the individual. He must make good, not just for himself, but for the family. He owes it to the family to make it in the new world. He has an existential burden in that the family is perpetually 'on his back': to escape entirely (read, psychologically) from the influence of the ancestors' shadow is a virtual impossibility. The 'family' inside him controls him from within. The lone migrant is seemingly set free to go off home ground, into the air, like a kite—but not without the family pulling the string, if necessary, back to the hearth, though not always successfully.<sup>4</sup> The migrant thus experiences the family in his everyday sojourning life as a real factor, sometimes seeing it as a liability, a constraint, other times as a source of strength and enablement. The destinies of the family and the individual are intertwined.

## Family, Migrant Community, and Cultural Change

Much of the literature on non-Chinese migration, as well as the 'intuition' of many westerners, is that assimilation follows migration because distance from the family and homeland is a form of 'groundlessness', an absence of transition (Chan and Tong 1993). The physical 'groundedness' in homeland or village is compensated for by other means in Chinese migration: the Confucian and patrilineal family ethos, coupled with the concentration of Chinese immigrants themselves into the peculiar ghettos known as Chinatowns, transforms and reinforces tradition. The lone migrant is a physical carrier of traditions and culture, while the family back in the homeland acts as an origin, a source of cultural transmission, and an agent of continuity. Being held in the family grid, the migrant is put in close contact with traditional Chinese cultural values: filial piety, obligations and duties to the family, hard work, frugality, and so on. Over time, the migrants, paradoxically, become 'enthusiastic proponents of traditional values' (Watson 1975, p. 215), often to a greater degree than when they left. As a result of the 'workings' of the family, the traditional culture is maintained and reproduced *within* the person of the migrant. The sociologist of Chinese migration rarely loses sight of the fact that the migrant as individual, though now away from the homeland, operates within a Chinatown, a migrant community which has its own institutional structure made up of a myriad of immigrant associations and organizations that are, in the case of the Chinese overseas, based on family/kin ties, common surname, and origin-locality. Home village, ancestral tomb, and common name are the stuff of the socio-cultural 'glue'. While reproducing traditional culture, such immigrant associations often function as 'surrogate' or 'substitute' families. They nurture and protect, but also apply sanctions on individual migrants, holding them in check, policing them, so to speak. The migrant communities are thus best seen as a sociological entity in a particular physical and cultural space.

<sup>4</sup> I owe the analogy of the kite to a discussion with Professor Taban Lo Liyong on 27 May 1994, at National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan.

They evolve and develop for themselves a blend of migrant ethos and morals and insist that the migrants abide by them or run the risk of being ostracized or disowned by the only community they can lay any claim to in a foreign land. The behaviour of the lone migrant is held in check both by a remote family, or the 'family idea', and by the immigrant associations' disciplinary influence. The migrant keeps his moral eye, his gaze, on others who share his values. As a result, he necessarily also keeps his gaze on himself—thus, the migrants collectively evolve a 'moral community'. The 'associational life' (Rex 1987; Rex and Josephides 1987) of individual migrants thus has its conservative, self-reinforcing, self-maintaining side.

The resulting social artefact is neither a migrant culture retrieved and transplanted from the past, from homeland, *in toto*, in its purest, essentialist form, nor a wholesale embrace and internalization of the host culture, since migrants' integration into the mainstream societal institutions is not desired by the natives—in fact, this integration is often systematically curtailed or blocked because of prejudice and discrimination. Ideologically speaking, two diametrically opposing 'identity options' (Rex 1987; Rex and Josephides 1987) are *on offer* to the migrant: assimilation or 'voluntary' confinement to an ethnic/cultural enclave (Wang 1993). Yet another option, increasingly available and chosen by many modern-day migrants, is that of a gradual combination of the two previously mutually exclusive options. The immigrant initially finds himself 'in the cracks' of a pull from the traditional culture and a push toward the mainstream local culture. Existentially, in his everyday life, he experiences the inevitable tension intrinsic to his dual existence. He is the marginal man (Park 1928) *par excellence*. But in the end, his marginality to two ways of being is no longer an either/or; it metamorphoses, producing a new hybridity, an integrated multiplicity. As a result of ethnic revival, through ethnicization and re-sinification, or through a personal or third-generation 'loopback' into tradition and heritage (Nagata 1985; Ang 1993), the culture of the past is to some extent retrieved, but also imagined,

idealized, romanticized, purified (Turner 1987; Lowenthal 1985; Chase and Shaw 1989); it is not a past duplicated *in toto*, in its completeness or essence. *The observed traditional cultural values that are enacted by the migrant are thus better seen as 'adaptive' or 'reactive' values than as transplanted, orthodox, authentic values* (Light 1980). The resultant past, thus transformed, can be more past than the past. This is why many a keen anthropological observer finds cultural behaviours in the immigrant community long lost or transformed in the homeland but, ironically, maintained, 're-antiquated', or re-packaged in their purest, 'most ancient' ways, paradoxically, in a new home.

Nagata (1985) reports in her study of Indonesian Chinese immigrants in Toronto, Canada, that immigrants typically change their names back to the Chinese originals, enrol in Chinese language classes for the first time, and show renewed interest in Chinese issues (to the consternation of the Indonesian Consul there). Others begin to celebrate Chinese festivals, observe customs, or practice rituals they have formerly (before migration) neglected, ignored, or taken for granted. Suddenly, Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, Hungry Ghost Festival, and so forth are reinvented and take on added significance.<sup>5</sup>

Typically, the migrant is brusquely thrown upon the harsh, always demanding present. His task is to transform himself, to acculturate; he must earn his hybridity, multiplicity, heterogeneity, and multi-dimensionality (Lowe 1991). Much is lost, much is gained. The immigrant is an emergent man, tentatively—but necessarily—a cul-

<sup>5</sup>Race riots punctuate the history of Indonesia, the latest as recent as May 1998. In 1965, Chinese stores were looted; 'killing communists' was often synonymous with killing Chinese. The Chinese were forced to send their children to Indonesian-language schools, culminating in the closure of all Chinese-medium schools in 1966. Today there are no Chinese schools in Indonesia. Ill feeling and distrust continue to exist between the Chinese and the Indonesians. In May 1998, Chinese were the targets of organized destructive attacks: their shops and homes were looted and burned down; many Chinese were injured or killed, and many Chinese women were raped. It was reported that about 100,000 Chinese had fled the country.

tural relativist, a pluralist. The immigrant community is an emergent community. The immigrant culture is an emergent culture. It incorporates into its orbit the triangle of China (tradition), the host society (present), and the world Chinese diaspora (future) as one colossal imagined community. The sociologist and anthropologist must therefore look at the problematic of cultural continuity and change in various overseas Chinese communities from this standpoint.

### The Hong Kong 'Astronaut Families'

By 1992, five years before the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China, official Hong Kong government estimates of emigration put the number of those leaving Hong Kong at over 66,000 per annum, the highest since it reached 20,000 in the early 1980s (Skeldon 1994b). Their principal destination countries were Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. These Hong Kong emigrants are among the world's middle-class international migrants—the elite (Wong 1992), the 'new middle class' (Li 1983), and the 'new' Chinese overseas (Skeldon 1994c). As a class of new actors on the international stage of migration, they set themselves apart from the unskilled, male labour migrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Well educated, highly trained with portable skills, and probably classified everywhere in the world as 'professional, technical, administrative, and managerial personnel' well versed in the art of dealing with government bureaucrats as well as in exploiting personal relations, they have been seeking entry en masse into the West. Their requests are often granted under increasingly popular programs for business immigrants and economic investors. They bring significant human capital and ethnic as well as class resources to their countries of destination.

'Astronaut families' is a term coined by the Hong Kong mass media to refer to contemporary middle-class dispersed nuclear families. They usually begin with one spouse (usually, though not always, the wife) and children settling in a host country, while another spouse (usually,

though not always, the husband) continues with his or her business or job in Hong Kong, periodically shuttling between the two places, making short stays in the adopted country to fulfil minimum immigration requirements and to maintain the solidarity of the family and the marriage. The term 'astronaut family' has a triple meaning. First, it denotes a family (or parts of it) and individuals in flight, in aerial motion, commuting, shuttling, traversing, travelling, crossing border sites; second, it signifies a family straddling two places, not in either one or the other but rather in both, in doubleness, in marginality and duality, in a 'two-legged existence', one in the country of 'exit' and 'origin', another in the country of 'entry' and 'destination'. Third, it attempts to describe the physical, psychic, and psychosocial existence of wives in families thus dispersed, in marriages thus separated. The Chinese counterpart of the English word 'astronaut' is made up of two Chinese ideographs: *tai*, referring to 'wife', and *kong*, meaning empty, lonely, solitary, hence wanting or lacking in something, unfulfilled. The term 'astronaut family' explicitly denotes the existence of an unaccompanied wife and young children.

Although a newly coined term occasioned by the mass emigration of Hongkongers, the word 'astronaut' has rather quickly found its way into the everyday vocabulary and discourse of Hong Kong as concerns migration. It is a familial and marital phenomenon linked with a host of 'social problems' or 'issues' (see Lam 1994; Skeldon 1994c). Spousal infidelity is one. Prolonged separation, distance from the ever-vigilant, normative moral constraints of family and marriage, and the new freedom of being unwatched and unattended in a not-yet-integrated immigrant community overseas challenge the ability of either spouse to confine sexuality within wedlock; the so-called emptiness of marital life and the attendant vulnerability to occasions of 'sin' (read, infidelity) applies equally to husband and wife. Extramarital affairs in the workplace and the use of prostitutes' services have never failed to capture the attention of the journalists who are accustomed to feeding a society in flux with sensational news of scandals.

Changes in parental supervision of young, growing children are another. Hong Kong migrant families typically want to avail themselves of educational opportunities in the West. Children are thus left to the care of one parent (usually the wife) in the adopted country. As a result, many 'astronaut families' have in fact been split into two: a female-headed, single-parent segment in one place, a lone father in another. The wives are thrown into circumstances where they are required to play substitute father and mother at the same time, or at different times, thus inevitably compounding the stress of relocation and resettlement. Lastly, Chinese often rationalize emigration to the West in terms of a parental, or paternalistic, desire to procure a better education, a better job, a better future prospect, eventually a better life, for their children, though, arguably, there is little evidence of the children having been consulted prior to such a momentous family move. Ironically, it stands to reason to suggest that some children, given a choice, may desire otherwise—to stay put. The scanty literature on second- and third-generation American-born Chinese children is beginning to serve notice that some such children are expressing feelings of ambivalence over these migration moves, while others are simply becoming resentful and angry—they are thrown into a destiny not of their own volition, forced into a resulting identity crisis that they must resolve.

The contemporary Hong Kong 'astronaut families' bear a certain resemblance to the dispersed Chinese families of the early 1900s in that husbands by themselves, alone, are to eke out an economic existence, though in reverse (wives and families are now at the destination, husbands back in Hong Kong). This circumstance sets in motion a host of familial and marital problems that require coping and adjustment. However, more so than their predecessors, the Hong Kong 'astronaut families' of today have adopted family dispersal and marital separation largely as a voluntary, anticipatory, purposive strategy to procure a better future life for all, in spite of present hardships. Family dispersal is discussed, deliberated upon, anticipated, and adopted as a migration strategy. Rationally factored into the migration calculus,

the idea of the family agreeing on a dispersal in which the wife and children move to the new country first precedes and launches migration. It is thus no longer simply a case of migration forcing family dispersal, *but also* of the family, paradoxically, anticipating a temporary rupture in togetherness to procure a desired, projected family future. As such, the dispersed migrant family is the social psychologist's delayed gratification *par excellence*, purposive and conscious.

Envisioned in such terms, the family in its physical, tangible sense is dispersed so as to realize, to make real, 'the family' as idea, ideal, or project. The ideal of 'the family' has thus become a source of motivation and energy setting forth the family dispersal strategy. The sociologist sees family dispersal, like migration and relocation themselves, as largely a voluntary, positive act (Wickramagamage 1992): it is progressive, anticipatory, and future oriented; it is enabling.

When the husband-migrant of hypermobility is straddling places, leapfrogging geographic and political boundaries—being the 'transilient'—he finds himself necessarily mindful of work or business opportunities wherever they are, both in Hong Kong and in the West. He might one day finally pack his bags and leave Hong Kong to reunite with his family in Canada, the United States, Australia, or wherever; not finding suitable work there, he might re-migrate back to Hong Kong, joining many, many others in 'return migration' (Chan 2012b; Chan and Chan 2012). Traversing these different zones of time and space, often many times over, in hypermobility, blunts and blurs the distinctions between place of 'origin' and 'destination', between 'exit' and 'entry', in his mind and in the realities of his experience. In a sense, culture becomes a portable substitute for place. Dichotomies become less sharply demarcated—his mobility orbit is thus cast in a *circulatory* international system of migration (Skeldon 1994c; Chan and Chan 2010; Chan 2011) or in what Rouse (1991) calls the 'transnational migrant circuit', where people, money, goods, and information circulate, while his existence is articulated in the structure of his dispersed family. The home, thus imagined, no longer takes the form of a fixed physical entity,

nor does it necessarily ground itself in a particular soil. The dispersed family, fashioning itself in a duality, or, rather (in the future, if not now), a plurality of places, provides him with a structure, form, and context to articulate his multiplicity of selves and identities, in motion, ‘in the cracks’ between psychologies, ethnicities, cultures, and civilizations, touching all. It is this motion, grounded in the phenomenology and anthropology of his migrant experience, that has given his existence a distinctive transnational, dynamic, ever-changing character—the consequent ideal for him is not one fixed, eternal, pure ethnicity but a somewhat integrated conglomerate of ethnicities that is most authentic and feels most comfortable in between boundaries, on the margins, at the peripheries. It is a hybrid identity that uses the dispersed family as an arena. Being post-modern, such a genre of Chinese ethnicity is inadvertently precarious, provisional, indeterminate, tentative (Ang 1993; Ngan and Chan 2012; Chan 2012a).

### Chinese Cosmopolitanism as Emergent Chinese Identity

Wang (1991) has identified five different types of Chinese identity in terms of variant orientations of overseas Chinese to China, the various host countries in the West such as Canada and the United States, and differential meanings attached to one single Chinese word *gen* (roots) (Wang 1993). They are *yeluo guigen* (fallen leaves return to the roots, the soil), or the classic, ‘old-fashioned’ sojourner mentality; *zancao chugen* (to eliminate grass, one must pull out its roots), or total assimilation; *luodi shenggen* (settle down or ‘sink roots’ in a foreign land and accommodate to the host society), or accommodation; *xungen wenzu* (search for one’s roots and ancestors), or ethnic pride and consciousness; and *shigen lizu* (lose contact with one’s roots and ancestors), or the uprooted, the alienated, the ‘wandering intellectuals away from their roots in historic China’, in exile.

In addition to these five types of Chinese identity, the identity of the Chinese transilient,

the new Chinese overseas, the new middle class, the transnational Chinese bourgeoisie that has been characterized thus far in this chapter, may well represent a sixth, new, emergent type. He has long since overcome or exorcised his desire to search for and sink his roots back in ancestral China. He may or may not go back; he has a choice; he has always made efforts to strive for integration, *without assimilation* or acculturation, in whatever country of abode he happens to find himself; strictly speaking, he is not really experimenting with accommodation in the host society either because he cannot see himself settling down and sinking his roots in any one single place or because his consciousness is not tied to one origin, one ethnicity, but to many. Neither is he the classic, much-caricatured ‘uprooted’ migrant, sad, unhappy, spiritually dispossessed, disgruntled, alienated, disheartened with the present *and* the past because he finds both dissatisfying and unacceptable, thus suspended in the air, rootless or uprooted, unable to go home again, psychically and physically speaking.

One may call this sixth emergent type of Chinese identity *zhonggen*, or multiple rootedness or consciousness. The Chinese word *zhong* has three meanings: first, multiple, not singular; second, regenerative, as in ‘born again’; third, to treasure, to value (one’s many diverse roots). It conjures up an image of a succession of sinking roots as process and multi-stranded roots as outcome. It is akin to what Lee (1991) calls ‘Chinese cosmopolitanism’. Himself calling the term a loose epithet, Lee (1991, p. 215) further explains it as ‘one that embraces both a *fundamental intellectual commitment* to Chinese culture *and* a multicultural reciprocity, which effectively cuts across all conventional national boundaries’. It is, in other words, ‘a purposefully marginal discourse’. To a Chinese cosmopolitan, again in Lee’s words, ‘the boundaries are again not so much geographical as intellectual and psychological’ (1991, p. 219). Of course, one is aware that, in a certain discourse, roots or *gen* always means ground, earth—the antithesis of trans-locality. There is thus the potential paradox of a trans-local, indeed transoceanic, rootedness—a decidedly mixed image.



As a sixth, new, emergent type of Chinese identity, he is perhaps the first, 'old-fashioned' sojourner type deconstructed, reconstructed, and brought 'back in vogue, in a rather more respectable form' (Nagata 1985). The new cosmopolitan is not the nineteenth-century sojourner, forever yearning to return to China, to go home, in mind or in body. The new Chinese overseas *may or may not* go home, just like his Jewish contemporaries, muttering quietly and privately to themselves, 'Next year in Jerusalem, *every year*'. He is forever crossing, traversing, mixing, translating linguistically and culturally (Clifford 1993). Yet, at any one given time and place, he is also sojourning, not intent on eventually going home to China, but, rather, willing to go anywhere, everywhere, provisionally. *It is his provisionality that seems particularly salient* and needs to be foregrounded. He makes a chronicle of brief appearances in a succession of geographic places, but always on the world stage. He has a suitcase at the door, always ready to go.

Lest this be mistaken for or confused with the romantic idealist's notion of a true, ultimate cosmopolitan, internationalized man with absolutely no physical, materialist anchorage—the *wugen* (the rootless), the one who does it all *without* (*wu* in Chinese) roots, transcending it all, who may or may not empirically exist—the 'sixth' type being all too briefly sketched here is one in whom 'a certain *elemental* awareness of Chinese identity at its *most basic* seems to *persist* uninterrupted beneath the surface (emphasis added)' (Nagata 1985, p. 22). He may or may not 'spontaneously invoke a Chinese identity in context'. Or, as Ang puts it, 'sometimes it is and sometimes it is not useful to stress our Chineseness, however defined. In other words, the answer (to the question why still identify ourselves as 'overseas Chinese' at all?) is *political*' (1991, p. 14).

Of course, the emergence of this new, 'sixth' type of Chinese identity necessarily takes place, negotiates, and articulates itself within an evolving global structure, a transnational trade environment wherein economies are intricately intertwined, those involving the Chinese capitalists included. Economists and sociologists are now casting their futuristic eyes on the emergence of a Chinese diaspora economy (Lever-Tracy and

Ip 1996). As observed by Ma Mung (1993), Chinese entrepreneurs in Paris, through trade expansion and diversification and through the creation of 'upstream enterprises' that involve trade *outside* the community formerly monopolized by non-Chinese businessmen, have been articulating their business networks and economic arrangements within a larger, global diaspora economy. By expropriating 'spatial resources' in a transnational space, Chinese entrepreneurship in Paris has taken on an *extra-territorial character*. The otherwise amorphous structure of such a diaspora economy, however, is given substance by the many nodes or poles that constitute non-local networks, be they in New York, Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta, Shanghai, Hong Kong, London, or Toronto. One may want to add that this extra-territorial business character has its personal counterpart in our sixth-type Chinese cosmopolitan.

Such a global economic system has its internal as well as its external principles of social organization. The observed gradual shift from a reliance on ethnic resources to a reliance on class resources among the *new* overseas Chinese has given this Chinese diaspora a new dimension (Chan and Ong 1995). Examples of ethnic resources, the result of internal sociocultural characteristics of an immigrant group or community, include ready access to start-up capital available at rotating credit associations within an ethnic community and a supply of cheap, dependable, loyal family, or co-ethnic labour. The more intangible ethnic resources include ethnic solidarity and in-group loyalty. Class resources are more formal in nature and have to do with educational qualifications, job training and skills, and expert knowledge of markets and industry. Class resources are the 'normal cultural and material endowment of bourgeoisies' (Light and Rosenstein 1995). On the material side, class resources include private property, human capital, and money to invest. The bourgeoisie also have their vocational culture, which includes occupationally relevant values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills acquired in the socialization process (Light and Rosenstein 1995).

Another vital source of the global system's economic energy will probably come from the much-speculated-upon emergence of a putative Chinese economic zone in Asia comprising East

and Southeast Asia. Lim (1992) has documented recent increases in trade, investment, and government economic links among the region's otherwise disparate nations, links which are often overlaid by an ethnic dimension; merchants of Southern Chinese descent, mainly Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese, have 'familial, clan and other ethnic links and networks which stretch across political and geographical boundaries' (Lim 1992, p. 43). One expects a freer flow of capital and credit between family, kin, and co-ethnics (Cohen 1994, p. 21); 'an intimate handshake of ethnic collectivism' is at work here. Within the Chinese diaspora, yet another principle of social organization, another source of cohesion, in addition to the now well-known familial and clan ties, is religion—important and vital, but little studied. In her analysis of religion's role among the Chinese in Southeast Asia and Canada, Nagata (1985) turns her attention to how Chinese Buddhists, Confucianists, and Christians are attempting to exert a global influence through their systems of internationally intertwined institutions.

## Conclusion

Migration disperses families, splits marriages. Yet the very act of migration is often preceded by the deliberate contemplation on the part of the family and kin groups of family dispersal as a migration strategy. The family concerned must undertake a calculative process to decide who is to go, who is to stay, when, and how—a rational choice in the name of the family, of safeguarding family continuity and well-being, while simultaneously bringing maximal benefits to all individuals, who otherwise will gain less and lose more, in the long haul, when acting alone.

Although family members are physically set apart from each other, the 'family' as collectivist emotion, sentiment, idea, or ideal provides a transnational source of unity. The concept of 'the family' is *binding* upon individual family members, while also *bonding* them. There is no binding without bonding, and vice versa. A familial contract is more enduring and binding partly because it is also based on emotions, which makes

it, as a contract, unique. Understood in this sense, family functions not only as an agency of bonding, solidarity, and intimacy, but also as an apparatus of bondage, confinement, and control.

Family dispersal is arguably as old as human migration. Human beings have always been moving, or moved, but now in greater numbers and at greater speed. More resourceful, the Hong Kong 'astronaut families', when taking a *long* view, are but one example of such dispersed families worldwide, Chinese or not Chinese. Thus, any attempt to 'pathologize' family dispersal as a family form is ahistorical and short-sighted; it fails to recognize the changing, increasingly prevalent and massive realities of international human migration and their impact on family forms.

In a modern-day, circulatory international migration system underpinned by a massive number of dispersed families as strategic nodes and linkages, the 'family compass' is invariably stretched further and further so that work and business opportunities begin to multiply themselves precisely because the work field has been expanded. In such a field expanded continually, globally, a new type of Chinese identity emerges: the transilient, the cosmopolitan, who, having been thrust into and later having chosen provisionality and multiplicity as a mode of existence, is best seen as a cultural hybrid. Home does not have to be here, or there, but is, tentatively, potentially, everywhere. This so radically alters the meaning of home (and homelessness) that the search for a new vocabulary becomes a priority. Hybridity is by nature multi-stranded and heterogeneous; it does not respect the primacy of centre over periphery, origin over destination, exit over entry, or vice versa. As ideology and reality, it revitalizes and renews the ideal of cultural diversity, relativity, and pluralism.

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# The Politics of Migrant Family Drama: Mainland Chinese Immigrants in Singapore

3

Chan Kwok-bun and Seet Chia Sing

Long, a 38-year old man, went to Singapore in 1997. He had been an engineer in China. Through friends who were working in Singapore, he learned of a job opening there and relocated. A year later his wife, Jian, joined him. Jian, a doctor with more than 8 years of medical practice, was unable to re-certify herself in Singapore; she gave up her medical practice and worked part-time in a Chinese language school.<sup>1</sup> Their son, Guang, arrived with Long's parents, who had taken care of him since Jian's departure, the following year. Aged eight, Guang attended a local primary school near their flat in the eastern part of the island. After school he was taken care of at home by Long's retired parents.

In 1992, Le, in his late 1930s, went to Singapore from Australia, where he had studied and worked for 3 years. His wife joined him in Australia in 1988, a few months after his arrival there. Their daughter Lydia, who was then only a year old,

was left in China with her maternal grandparents. Le did not know about this childcare arrangement until he met his wife at the airport.<sup>2</sup> When he was recruited to Singapore, arrangements were made for Lydia to rejoin them. While Le continued to pursue his career, his wife gave up her job as a human resources manager. The woman who never had any intention of becoming a full-time homemaker was forced to become one.

Ling went to Singapore in 1997; her daughter, En, followed a year later. Her husband, the first in the family to move, had made use of his technical skills, which were in high demand in Singapore then, to facilitate his move out of China. Ling followed shortly, but while her husband had maintained his job status, Ling lost hers. Despite a good degree from a renowned university and years of experience in teaching, she could not find a job in her previous field. She had gone back to school to "upgrade" her skills.

Zhen, 27, was engaged to a childhood friend, Shan, who went to Singapore in mid-1996 for his post-graduate studies. The two did not see each other again until Shan went back to China for their wedding in December, 1998. They used letters, e-mail, and the telephone to make their marriage preparations. Within a year and a half they had a newborn son. They lived in a flat with their son and Shan's mother, who came to help out

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<sup>1</sup>Teaching Chinese is one major source of income for women migrants, especially the newly arrived. Few of them were formally trained in teaching the Chinese language. The sister-in-law of one of our respondents taught Chinese despite having been trained to teach English at the secondary school level in China.

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<sup>2</sup>Le told us that he was expecting his daughter to be there as well. His wife decided that it would be inconvenient to bring her along. Le thought that his wife might be tired of taking care of the girl and wanted a break from childcare.

with the baby. This enabled Zhen to return to work after her one-month maternity leave. She worked as an administrative clerk in an insurance company, a job that she “luckily” found soon after arriving in Singapore.<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese have always migrated. Each wave of migrants is the result of different circumstances, and has its own opportunities and constraints. The peak of out-migration occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, when massive numbers of people flowed out of China to all parts of the world during the “coolie trade”, but Chinese migrations did not begin or end there (Pan 1998; Sowell 1996).<sup>4</sup> Migrations out of China have continued until this very day.

Compared to other countries, such as those in North America, Europe, Australia, and Southeast Asia, Singapore is a different sort of destination for Chinese migrants. Unlike places where the Chinese are a minority and live together in the same area as “foreigners”, Chinese foreign-ness in Singapore, where a Chinese majority stands at 76.5%, is relatively inconspicuous. This, however, does not mean that the divide is invisible. In fact, constant efforts to distinguish between each other are not only made by the Singaporean Chinese but also by their counterparts from China.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In China Zhen worked in a bank for five years and held a middle-management position at the time she decided to leave her job. Her proficiency in the English language explains why she was able to obtain a job there with ease.

<sup>4</sup> Poston and Yu (1990, pp. 480–481) divided the emigration history of China into four periods: the ancient period from the Chinese dynasties thousands of years ago to the mid-Qing dynasty in the eighteenth century; from the decline of Imperial China to the Republican period in the 1940s; the first three decades of the People’s Republic of China to the late 1970s; and the contemporary period. A brief overview of that history in relation to Southeast Asia is provided by Skeldon (1992a, b) and Pryor (1979).

<sup>5</sup> For instance: Min, a 35-year-old single woman, told us, “The people here speak English, but I don’t. I speak Chinese. I guess that’s the difference.” She communicated this idea in English. As a Canadian citizen who had spent about 10 years in Canada and, before that, five in Norway, both times in English-speaking communities, Min speaks English fluently. Her statement should be read as part of a construction of her “authentic” Chinese identity, which she uses to distinguish herself from the local people in Singapore.

Social distance is evident. Despite being so close in physical appearance to the “natives” that nobody can tell the two apart, the migrant from China remains “foreign” and, therefore, at a distance. Like Simmel’s (1908) stranger, the contemporary Chinese migrant works and lives in Singapore, and is therefore “fixed” here. Nevertheless, the migrant has not “belonged here from the beginning”, and remains foreign no matter what he looks like. So close, yet so far away.

## Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Migration studies have become more important as the movement of people around the globe increases in magnitude and frequency, both within and across national boundaries. With a significant proportion of the world’s population having moved from their place of birth, and the global volume of remittances estimated at US\$71.1 billion in 1990, second only to the trade in crude oil (Russell 1979, p. 269), attention has been focused on the centrality of international migration in world development. The conventional structural approach, emphasising historical transformations, uses push-and-pull factors to account for movements between cities and countries (Sassen-Koob 1983; Griffin 1976; Pearse 1970), hypothesising that pull factors at the place of departure couple with push factors at the place of arrival to produce movement of people. This macroscopic explanation, however, lacks power of predictability. Focusing on uniformity in thoughts and interest positions, rather than on variations, this classical approach fails to explain why some move, while many others facing the same conditions stay put. The conceptual gap between structural conditions and individual actions is thus left unbridged. Moreover, push-and-pull factors are neither explicit, simple, nor exhaustive. With each migrant holding onto his or her individual list of the so-called repulsive and attractive factors regarding migration, how can family migration

be explained, where individuals with very different agendas move together?

Classical economics emerged to take part in “reading” migration decisions and trends (Sjaastad 1962). Neo-classical labour economics, in its endeavour to fill the gap left by the push–pull theory, suggested that movement can be predicted by taking into consideration all the individual members’ expected costs and returns. When the present value of net benefits, after discounting the real interest rate, is positive, migration occurs. Stressing the economic rationality of migrants, this school of thought is flawed. To begin with, estimating non-monetary indirect costs, such as adaptation costs and the loss in affective ties,<sup>6</sup> and converting them into a mathematical equation, are daunting tasks. Even if this estimation is achievable, the equation fails to account for the power each member possesses to affect the outcome, which is highly dissimilar. Despite accounting for everyone in the summation, the meaning attached to these gains and losses differs greatly. Plus signs cannot be expected for every part of the equation. Minus signs have different results depending on which member of the family they attach to. For instance, when the father of a family has to pay a price, the impact on the final decision is different as compared to the daughter having to bear the same cost, despite the magnitude being quantitatively identical. Some family members are always on the side of the equation that yields returns, while others remain on the side that pays the price.

The very idea of the family as a monolithic, harmonious, unitary whole is problematic. Yet, we are taught from childhood that “families are special”:

A family is a group of people who are related to each other ... family consists of people who not only live together under one roof, but love and care

for one another, and laugh and cry together in good times and bad times. It is the family sharing and doing things together that makes growing up special. We are all part of a family even if all the members of the family do not live together...<sup>7</sup>

As an institution, the family not only supports us, but also wraps us up like an envelope, confines and imprisons us. This psychological imprisonment determines how we in turn approach the family, construct it, study it, and comprehend it as sociologists. The family is an institution, in the sociological sense. Being mindful of “an institution as a regulatory agency, channelling human actions in much the same way as instincts channel animal behaviour ... (which) provide(s) procedures through which human conduct is patterned, compelled to go, in grooves deemed desirable by society”, the individual is led to “believe(s) that the institutionally predefined course of action is the only one he could possibly take, the only one he is ontologically capable of” (Berger 1963, pp. 104–106). It is not only the subjects of study who are kept within bounds in this way, the person studying them is not exempt, hence the imperative for sociologists to be aware of their own preconceptions.

The traditional functionalist theorist “sees the family as universal and holds the belief that the nuclear family is ‘fitted’ to the needs of modern industrial societies” (Court 1997, p. 83); the

<sup>7</sup>An extract from a primary-five textbook used in almost all the primary schools in Singapore. On the same page is the chorus of the song, “Heart of the Nation”:

Family is everything  
The joy, the hope, a home can bring.  
Family’s a living light  
To guide you through the darkest night.  
The heart and soul of your life is the love  
You always find when you’re safe at home.  
*It’s the strength of a new generation*  
It’s the heart of the nation.

The song was composed to mark the First International Year of the Family in 1994. The “effectiveness” of the ideology of “the family” comes about precisely as a result of this kind of continual construction and reinforcement of the “reality” of “the family” through institutions such as education and the state, as well as through the family itself.

<sup>6</sup>These ties might not be lost after all with advances in the technology of long-distance communication. However, the costs involved in using these technologies to upkeep these ties require vigorous estimation.



monolithic construct of the family is deeply planted. On the other hand, feminist research approaches the family as a site of gender exploitation where inequalities have a way of justifying themselves (Eichler 1997). Meanwhile, use of the systems perspective in migration studies has been increasing (cf., Kritz and Zlotnick 1992; Pohjola 1991; Boyd 1989; Fawcett and Arnold 1987). In their study of the Vietnamese in Quebec, Chan and Dorais (1998) observed:

As an institution, the family lies at the heart of a triangle linking the local host society, the diasporas, and Vietnam. The resolution of personal and familial strains emanating from emergent forces of such triangulation raises important sociological as well as anthropological questions about culture, family, identity, and citizenship (1998:286).

Family and kin networks provide critical material assistance to migrants. The migration system, with two or more places linked by flows and counter-flows of people, information, material, and resources, is interconnected and interdependent. Focusing on the family and its social networks allows us to dissect the migration decision at an intermediate level, while striving to connect the micro-individual level with the macro-societal-global level. Mediating between the two levels of analysis, the family can be used as a strategic unit of analysis to facilitate understanding of the migrants' experience.

There has been no shortage of research on families in migration (cf., Hugo 1995; Hendrix 1979; Kamiar and Ismail 1991; Perez 1986), but most of them tend to focus on the male heads of the households. Cooperation and coordination within this "cohesive" unit is assumed or alleged—with migration as a long-term strategy for benefiting the family. Studies on family migration and decisions are conducted on the basis of the "common knowledge" that the family is a uniform entity. Women, who are part of a unitary family unit, hence move with "similar" motivations as men, who represent them and the family (Mincer 1978; Shihadeh 1991). Such studies are indifferent to the members within the household as distinct individuals and blind to any divergence in the interests of the different members.

Issues on women in migration have received increasing attention due to the sheer volume of women migrating independently alongside an emerging feminist perspective (Simon and Brettel 1986; Day and Icduygu 1997; Morokvasic 1984; Pedraza 1991). This gendered perspective demands "a scholarly reengagement with those institutions and ideologies immigrants create and encounter in the 'home' and 'host' countries in order to determine how patriarchy organises family life, work, community associations, law and public policy, and so on" (Pessar 1998, p. 577). Unfortunately, this gendered perspective has not replaced the more traditional ones. Family migration research continues to thrive under the adoption of a conventional, male-biased argument.

That the migrant family is a site of oppression and exploitation is not a new discovery (cf., Foner 1997b; Khaled 1995; Kibria 1993). Working on "an awareness that the family is not just a haven in a heartless world but a place where conflict and negotiation also take place" (Foner 1997b, p. 961), some studies have acknowledged the intentional as well as unintended reinforcement of patriarchal relationships within the migrant households. This is especially evident in the spousal relations, as one party, usually the wives, "in accommodating the career goals of their husbands, is willing to play a secondary and supporting role in order to enhance the long-term advancement of the whole family" (Ngo 1994, p. 406). The family, a site of power struggles and inequalities, is simultaneously the site of justifications and rationalisations, which attempt to patch up the disparities between tradition, conventional wisdom, and experience.

By presenting the experiences of the individual members within the family unit, sociologists strive to give everybody a voice. However, it should be noted that in spite of encouragement to speak "for themselves", many people remain silent because of their position in the family:

Our language is not chosen by ourselves but imposed upon us by the particular social group that is in charge of our initial socialisation. Society predefines for us that fundamental symbolic

apparatus with which we grasp the world, order our experience and interpret our existence (Berger 1963, p. 136).

Despite sociologists' efforts to create a space for the woman's voice to be heard, pauses and moments of silence are to be expected. After being deprived of a voice for so long, some women are no longer capable of speaking for themselves without borrowing from the normally heard voices, replicating them in an analogous language.<sup>8</sup> Women as speakers are still socially located within a patriarchal society.

By listening intuitively we may hear the inaudible. But more often, an initiator needs to generate upheaval from without to hear what has gone unspoken; and there is always a danger that the initiator is merely picking up echoes from within.

Migration is part of a life process. It is not an isolated experience that can be studied independently, but one that spills over into all segments of life, though each segment continues to be studied and discussed separately by sociologists. Migrants are holistic actors, and researchers should be careful to approach them as they are, instead of viewing them as objects-of-inquiry in "isolated" conditions laid down by the objectives of a study. Migration does not exist as a unitary text but is variously intersected by gender, generation, ethnicity, class, and religion. There is a need to de-compartmentalise experience, to read migration as part of a continuity (or series of discontinuities), and not as a detached event.

The family, as a group of people related by blood or marriage, is to be distinguished from "the family" as a system of relations and ideologies internalised through socialisation and then mapped back onto our understanding and interpretation of other events and structures (Laing 1972). To demonstrate the power of the metaphor of "the family", numerous on-going and recurring family dramas need to be displayed and demonstrated. We need

to examine how individual members "add up" to make a family, thus not allowing the lone male to construct and reconstruct all his assumptions and project them back onto the rest of the family.

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## The Study and the Sample

Twenty-seven Chinese migrant families then sojourning in Singapore were interviewed in 2000. Instead of the usual "once and for all" interviews, contact with some of these families was maintained throughout the entire research period. This allowed rapport to be built over time and provided openings into deeper issues revealing the workings of the family. In order to set a stage for family dynamics, some parents and children were interviewed together. Initial contacts consisted of personal friends and informants introduced by friends. The snowballing technique was also used, but only to a limited extent. This is in part to prevent crowding the research with respondents grouped by certain characteristics, such as religion and occupation, which could distort the findings or block out potential areas of exploration. Face-to-face in-depth interviews, each averaging an hour, were held at the respondents' residence, office, or other public places. Conducted mainly in Putonghua<sup>9</sup> and primarily unstructured, the interviews allowed respondents to talk freely about their personal views and experiences,<sup>10</sup> and gave the researchers room to probe.

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<sup>9</sup>All interviews except five were conducted in Putonghua. The language used does matter, as shown by one interview session with Zhang. There were long pauses in the conversation while Zhang thought about what he wanted to say until the language was switched from English to Putonghua, at which point Zhang responded easily.

<sup>10</sup>Although most were willing to talk about their own migration history, personal questions proved offensive to two interviewees, Pan and Liang. Pan, who had training in the hard sciences, could not understand the use of the individual experience, finding it a waste of time. Towards the second half of the hour-long interview, he became less uneasy and more willing to talk about his and his family's migration moves. Liang was willing to answer general types of questions but hesitant about telling his own story throughout the interview.

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<sup>8</sup>In his preface to *Madness and Civilization* (1971), Foucault argued that, until the mad person speaks the language of the sane, he will continue to be perceived as mad. There is a need to go back to a zero point just before the divide between the mad and the sane came into being.



Despite the obvious methodological importance of accessing alternative opinions of diverse sources, entry was not immediate and permission to gain contact was never guaranteed. Out of 27 families, only seven children were interviewed. Similarly, out of eleven three-tier families with 15 grandparents in them, we only managed to speak to five elderly persons.

During the second phase of our study, we made contact through electronic mail with migrants in the academic field in local universities. Our efforts to obtain official data and to contact related organisations, such as the Chinese embassy and a church with a mainland Chinese congregation, were also unsuccessful. The bulk of our data consisted of transcripts from interviews and observations we made of the migrants' homes. Familial relations and personal emotions could be better accessed and assessed while the meaning of inter/intra-personal conflicts could be read into and grasped from the direct interaction between the researcher and the family member. To augment this primary data, other sources, such as letters, electronic mail, and telephone bills, were also used.

Before analysing the decision to migrate, we would like to stress that we can make only partial sense of migrants' motivations. The researcher's understanding is merely the second tier of a double interpretation process. The researcher makes interpretations and needs to find ways of checking their validity. Motives may be neither clear nor straightforward, not even for the migrants themselves.

## The Migrants' Side of the Story

Examining the history of the decision to move is one way to make sense of a family's migration:

My friend recommended me for this job. His company was looking for someone with a good knowledge of China and can work here .... I was very displeased with my work then .... In China, many of the supervisors were not concerned about your qualifications at all .... Most had never attended university ... so they use people based on practical experience and relationship .... Most recent graduates end up with little chance .... I didn't like to be

involved in all the politics, so I left (Lin, a man in his early 30s).

I came four years ago, but I left China 11 years ago .... I studied in Canada and then worked in Hong Kong .... Opportunities in China were limited back then, so I didn't return ... but my wife was in Shenzhen .... I came here by accident, I read about the job opening in the newspaper .... I was married but I didn't have any children yet, so my mobility was higher .... I wanted to try out, so I sent the application ... then, I came .... (Zeng, male, 33).<sup>11</sup>

I was working in America .... Singapore's Economic and Development Board (EDB) held some recruitment talks for the Chinese there .... I was informed through the Chinese Student Association .... I just went .... At that time, American economy was bad and I could only get temporary positions. Singapore was offering me a longer-term job .... (Ao, male, 40).<sup>12</sup>

An ex-colleague introduced me to my current job. I thought that it was a good opportunity .... Anyway, if it doesn't work out, I can still go back, or go somewhere else .... I had always thought of going overseas after graduating .... But, after I have my own family, it is not very convenient to move again. Moreover, it costs about twenty, thirty thousand Renminbi and I need to consider before raising that sum .... (Long, male, 38).

The efforts of the Singapore government and local recruitment brokers to attract skilled labour, together with the migrant's feelings of dissatisfaction with the status quo, desire for adventure, and hope for better work opportunities, all account for their decisions to move. Migrants go where the opportunities are, even though most of them do not know much about Singapore. They take the risk and hope the new country will offer what the old one did not.

But is this all there is to it? Does the structural approach to migration studies have anything to offer? After all the criticisms of the push-pull theory, it seems that it still holds sway in the migrants' own discourse. The migrants themselves strongly believe in the general societal conditions being deterministic. So why this rumpus about the classical theory when many migrants are mimick-

<sup>11</sup> Zeng arrived four years ago, and his wife joined him half a year later. Now his parents-in-law also live with them and help his wife, who has stopped working, look after their son.

<sup>12</sup> Ao went to Singapore about ten years ago as a bachelor. He was married to a Singaporean woman.

ing the structural theorists, explaining their situation with similar words and a similar logic?

Macro-conditions do have a part to play in migration. One cannot study migration without painting a larger picture. The general political system as well as the economic climate affect the decision to migrate, and way before that, the ability to think about migrating. However, one cannot rely heavily upon these macroscopic factors to predict a migrant's conduct, or, given the same conditions, everyone would migrate.

Opportunities are more meaningfully understood as "opportunities for whom". Access to opportunities is not equally distributed among the family members. The greater opportunities fall to the decision-makers in the family, and the negligible, or even negative, opportunities to those with little power in decision-making. Upon a closer look at the reasons given for migration, it is obvious that most of those who cited external conditions as motivations and as if they were matters of fact, were men.

We will look at the other side, or rather, sides, of the story, since reality is not binary, to see where the fallibility of the structural approach and the falsity of over-generalising manifest themselves. Those grand explanations, which so nicely fit into the theorists' hypotheses, only pertain to certain people, usually heads of households, who may be trying to justify their decision to migrate. Not everyone's say is given due attention. This inequality is often perpetuated by the researchers themselves, knowingly or not, who muffle the voices of the rest of the family by recognising only the male heads of household.

## Listen Carefully

We now turn to another set of responses in answer to the reasons for migrating:

It is not exactly that I liked the idea of coming to Singapore; it is because Shan was here. He planned to work here, and at least stay for some years, so I came (Zhen, woman, 29).

Lin [her husband] didn't feel happy working in his unit. It was quite pointless for him to stay on .... Since there was an opportunity here, it doesn't make much difference for me (Rong, woman, 30).

In China, there have always been desires among those better qualified and with the capability, to want to leave the country .... I'd thought of going overseas too, but that was before I got married. It remained a dream .... Depending on opportunities, most would like to go to America. But, for me, Singapore seems like a better option because it is nearer and there are many Chinese here .... Therefore, when my husband first mentioned that he would like to work here, I didn't have many reservations (Ling, woman, 32).<sup>13</sup>

Feng [her husband] was working here and he felt that Singapore is not bad .... His work is here, and there are better prospects here for him ... so I followed .... Living apart is not a long-term solution. It is like separation (Xing, woman, 36).<sup>14</sup>

My husband came first, after he obtained his PR (Permanent Residence), my child and I came over ... no definite reason .... I was quite passive in the whole process. Frankly, we already have a family in China, to migrate is actually very troublesome ... but my husband felt that his job in China was unsatisfactory and prospects weren't good, so he came out .... I respect his decision. (Jiao, woman, thirty something).<sup>15</sup>

Actually, I'd never really given it serious thought .... My husband is a computer engineer. There is a demand for his expertise here and his prospects would be better .... In terms of technology, it is still quite backward in China .... He came over, so I guess that's why I'm here ... (Hong, woman, late twenties).

Since he is here, I would not want to stay in China for long. It's only a matter of time that either

<sup>13</sup>Ling was a student. She worked for a tuition centre when she first came and later through the principal got a job in a Chinese publication department. After working there for about a year, she found the pay structure to be highly discriminatory and unfair to her, so she quit. She then shared a five-room rented flat with another couple from China.

<sup>14</sup>Xing, 36, has been in Singapore since 1993. Like Jian, she came from China to join her husband, Feng, who was then working as an architect there. She brought along her son, then four. She is now a teacher in a childcare centre. She was inexperienced in this area, given her professional training in advanced mathematical calculations with applications in satellite initiation. She was the only one in the family who still held a Chinese passport while Feng, her son and her younger daughter, who was born there, already had their Singapore citizenship.

<sup>15</sup>Jiao lived with her husband and her 10-year-old girl. Her parents went to Singapore to visit them 10 months ago. But according to her, they would not stay much longer as they could not adjust to the lifestyle and could not find other old folks to talk to. They only spoke the Fujian dialect and their neighbours did not.

he'll go back or I'll come out .... Not long after he left, I started to apply for my visa .... It was not much of a decision. Of course I was very sad to give up my clinic. I had just started it with a friend and I cannot even continue my medical practice here .... My credentials and experience aren't recognised .... But my family is still more important .... Anyway, my life is still going on quite well at the tuition centre. I have made many friends. (Jian, woman in her thirties).

The men moved and their wives followed, complying with their husband's decision and trailing their moves. These women had little independent wish to migrate. They reckoned that when husbands move, families split, and this split should not be permanent. While men often acknowledged the sacrifice their wives had made, seeing it as a waste for women to give up their careers, and aware of the pain on their behalf, they usually hastened to add that there had been "no choice" and that "it could not be helped".

Our women respondents, surprisingly, seemed to take their losses lightly. No one mentioned being "wronged". Most made sense of their move by seeing it as a way to improve the living conditions of their families; by "following", they were helping to make the family dream come true. In spite of job dislocations and personal frustrations, they upheld the claim that the family benefits, and that this was the most important thing. They saw the family as a supra-structure, beyond the self, and worth relinquishing their own "selfish" rights for.

The above makes it clear that for every seemingly rational, calculated move, there are other irrational ones, especially when families move "as a whole". It is hard to believe that a doctor turned part-time private tutor, or a manager turned homemaker, can be formulated arithmetically as an equation of net gain for the family. What is more amazing is that none of these highly educated women voiced any doubt. They still seemed to expect a positive return.

Migration, as a move that affects the family even if not all the family migrate, is often talked about as if it were a "family decision". Although most of our respondents said that a discussion

was "of course" held, not many gave details except concerning the physical arrangements. These arrangements, of who moves first, when and how, followed by whom, and so on, are the observables, or "facts" that the researcher can reflect upon.<sup>16</sup> Through these observables, meaning and interpretation can be designated to the actors. These visible "facts" once again point to those whose interests are really at stake in the course of migration. Power dialectics are uncovered as one slowly unwraps the seemingly unitary family. In cases where the woman moved first, did she do so for her own sake?

I felt it was right and just went ahead to send in my application. My husband said nothing against it .... If I'd come to work, he'd object, but I came to study .... My parents were not happy .... I had quite a good job and a stable life ... but I hope to widen my horizons .... (Mei, woman, 32).

In the case of Mei,<sup>17</sup> she moved first, leaving her husband and son in China, but only to experience an even tighter bond with "the family" as an ideal. Like the lone migrant discussed in Chan's (Chap. 2) analysis of the "individual" Chinese migrant, she is "seemingly set free to go off home ground, into the air, like a kite—but not without the family pulling the string". One part of her was tied to her husband, as she was continually on the look out for openings for him to come over. Another part was bonded to the son she had left with her parents in China, and whom she had

<sup>16</sup>These "facts" are not easily assessed, however. Much of the detail had been lost due to the lapse of time between the actual migration and our research. The major events as narrated were sanitised accounts of their moves.

<sup>17</sup>Mei, 32, went to Singapore alone, on a student pass, leaving her family in China. Her son was then seven. Her husband, Mo, is a dentist; Mei is an engineer, which is perhaps why she was the initiator of the migration. Mei went on a scholarship for a postgraduate position in a local university. This job provided for her living expenses and later, Mo's. Mo went over half a year later, also on a student pass. Due to the difficulty in securing a place in the medical school, he enrolled in a Master in Business Administration course instead. Her son had been in Mei's parents' care since she left. Since Mei and Mo were on student passes, neither can apply for their son to come over. At the time of this study, her case had been on hold for a year.

totally lost her say over. She wanted her son to learn English before coming over for the entrance test at a local primary school in Singapore. She entrusted the task of getting him an English tutor to her parents. Dismissing the idea as unimportant, her parents refused to do so. She could do nothing. These worries and frustrations had torn her apart emotionally, adding to all the problems she had to face in the host country. When her husband finally arrived her situation did not improve, but became even worse:

My husband doesn't like me to go out with friends. He objects to me going out too often .... I seldom join my friends nowadays. Now, my life revolves around this office.

Now that Mei is alone with her husband, instead of sharing her life with him, she is more isolated than before he arrived. She is unable to see her friends and she even kept these interviews with us a secret from him, meeting us in her office. She said that the place that she rented with her husband is not "home" for her. She would rather be in her office. She used to love the rainy days in China, being at home and just resting and enjoying the rain. In Singapore, such ease is impossible, with no sense of home, and entangled as she is with going along with the will of her husband and losing control over her son. Her migration opportunity led not to empowerment but entrapment and loss.

Women who followed their husbands' moves "successfully" had a different story to tell. Many of these women, despite a dramatic fall in status, seemed calm and accepting, at least on the surface. Few of them found work equivalent to their jobs in China. This is not surprising since "a high level of education does not necessarily guarantee high status in the labour market due to a lack of mechanism to recognise foreign credentials" (Liu 1994, p. 584).

To give a few examples: Xie's wife, who used to be a practitioner of Chinese medicine, worked in a clinic in Singapore as a receptionist. Long's wife, also a doctor, gave up her seven years of training, eight years of practice as a skin specialist, and her newly set-up clinic to join her husband in Singapore and work as a part-time Chinese language teacher. Zhang's wife, who worked as a

mechanical engineer, stayed at home in Singapore to look after her 16 month-old toddler, as she could not find a suitable job. Hong, without waiting for her results in the qualifying examinations to get her lawyer's license in China, followed her husband to Singapore and went back to school to "upgrade" her qualifications. Li's wife first gave up her post as a financial analyst when she went with him to Australia, and later dropped out of the degree program in computing she was halfway through when Li decided to move to Singapore. In a new country, she stayed at home. Jiao never complained about her teaching job in a secondary school in China. Her relationship with her superiors was not very good, but she liked her colleagues. Although the hours were long and she had to travel some distance on unpaved mud roads with heavy truck traffic, she derived great satisfaction from her job. But her husband asked her to quit and join him in Singapore, saying that he was constantly worried about her safety during the long and "dangerous" trips to work. Because of his anxiety, she quit her job and joined him. Working in Singapore as a part-time home tutor in Chinese, she had little job satisfaction, and the money only supplemented her household income.

Our account of the women's work dislocation could go on and on. Besides losing their self-reliance, these women have forfeited their self-esteem. Blatant discrimination and subtle prejudices from their hosts along with the loss of marital power must have occasioned some inner turmoil. But none of them spoke about it much.

When these women did lament, they did so for others. Perhaps they were projecting what they thought of as undesirable and "sad" onto other women they knew. Most insisted their own condition was "not too bad", seeing themselves as "lucky" compared to many migrant women they knew. Social comparison was evident in their perception of well-being or deprivation. The other women they had in mind were friends, acquaintances, friends of friends, and sometimes even fictional characters created by merging hearsay with imagination. By making up these unfortunate others, they lessened their own plight.

"Most people are motivated to justify their own actions, beliefs, and feelings. When a person

does something, he will try, if at all possible, to convince himself (and others) that it was a logical, reasonable thing to do" (Aronson 1972, p. 86). The irrevocability of their decision to move might well cause them to justify the move as rational and "good", however irrational and "bad" it might feel after the fact. This distortion in the face of the irrevocability of the move results in comments such as "Every move is a right move". Knowing that a sacrifice on their part is inevitable, they attempt to reduce the unpleasantness of the situation by convincing themselves that "It is not so bad after all". When there appears to be an absence of external justification, especially for the migrant women who so evidently failed to benefit from the move, according to Aronson's dissonance theory, they begin to believe their own lies. The best and most efficient justification is based on a set of values about the family. There exists a mechanism inherent in the family structure that explains away one's personal misfortune and suffering. Sacrifices for the good of the family are not tragic, they are simply the right, honorable thing to do, the only course of action.

### **"It Was for You We Moved": Children in Migration**

Children have the least say in the decision to move, although their life chances and experiences are affected the most. While adapting to a new environment may be difficult for adults, at least they left home by their own choice. Children usually have none at all:

I don't like it here .... I love to climb mountains with my grandfather during weekends. We do that back home .... Here, there is only school. I want to go back .... Mother says we will go back, but we never will .... (En, six, Ling's daughter who migrated less than two years ago.)

She always asks us to bring her back .... My parents came with her initially and when they were around, things were not so bad. After that she began to throw temper tantrums ... she keeps saying that she has to go back to Hangzhou .... Once I told her if I had time, I would bring her back to visit her grandparents. She thought we were going back for good and went back to her school to

announce that she's leaving Singapore .... Now, she only hints at that once in a while, not as frequently .... Children forget (Ling, woman, 32).<sup>18</sup>

Although our respondents appear to be unaffected by the "logic" of making sacrifices for the family and, aware of the costs such sacrifices entail, the adults still retain control and the child's voice is discounted. Frequently those children who are the most honest and vocal about the move, are dismissed as being "immature". The parents seem to believe what it suits them to believe: namely, that children are so adaptable that they are the ones who have the least difficulty adjusting to life in a new country. The initial "transitional" period of throwing tantrums is expected and normal, nothing to worry about. Insisting that "children forget", adults normalise their children's reactions towards migration. In this way the child's voice is muffled, or, if the child is ignored, silenced.

Over time children do stop their "complaints", relinquishing the struggle as a lost cause. This is read as adapting to the local culture and lifestyle. Children's views are seldom solicited before the move and are disregarded after the move. Yet most parents insist they migrated "for the children".

### **A "Blissful" Retirement for Grandparents**

Another group of migrants whose voices are not heard are the elderly, those grandparents brought to Singapore by their adult children to enjoy "blissful family life"—by providing free childcare for their grandchildren. To those who have been caregivers much of their adult lives, it is a continuation of their "good fortune" to spend old age babysitting their grandchildren. This hegemonic cultural image of the elderly in China

<sup>18</sup>Ling was not the only one who insisted that children were forgetful. One of our respondents even asserted that young children can be taken anywhere as long as their toys are with them. Another mother said that once children start going to school and making friends there, they will not remember anything back in China.



taking delight in their roles as grandparents leads to their exploitation for the good of the family.

Some couples come to Singapore first, leaving their children in the care of their own parents in China. Other dual-career couples bring their parents over to Singapore and assign them home-making duties. Most grandparents are on social visit passes, while a few are on dependent passes. A small handful eventually obtain permanent residence, and even fewer apply for citizenship. They are the least permanent residents of the family in Singapore, and the most dependent. As domestic helpers they provide labour in the private sector, but their work is not considered as such from the public standpoint. Their necessary help is often discounted or hidden behind the ideal of the family.

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### All in the Family, All for the Family

To be at home is to have the sense of a terrain—spatial, epistemological, and cultural—which one expects to navigate with smoothness and ease. But homes, like other civic institutions, are sites for producing and reproducing bodies, borders, subject positions, discourses and ideologies, mechanisms of surveillance and discipline (Sagar 1997, p. 237).

The family presents a disturbing site for investigations into migration decisions and lives. An extreme form of exploitation is equipped with a most delicate and subtle form of justification:

Family oppression is about family subordinates being personal dependants. It is about their not being able to change to another husband/father [in this case, son as well] and their having to do whatever their husband/father requires rather than specific tasks .... Family dependants do not own their own labour power in the same way as the heads of households own theirs .... (Delphy and Leonard 1992, pp. 1–2).

The issue is not simply oppression, however. The construct of “the family” as internalised by the individuals within it acts back upon them. In situations where there are supposedly choices and options, the individuals do not experience freedom of choice because the ideal of the family controls them from within. The surface “common good” is actually a cover-up for many inequities,

a way to hide them from the outsider’s gaze and, to a large extent, from the insider’s own awareness of what is really occurring.

“Irrational” moves do occur, and may be labelled as such even when they benefit the head of the household, and even when the family appears harmonious and functional. In the cases of many trailing spouses, trailing children, and trailing grandparents, the structure provides a justification the individual can use to make sense of his or her journey—that the move benefits the family as a whole, and is therefore good.

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### Constructing “The Family” in the Transnational Arena

“In a transnational perspective, contemporary immigrants are seen as maintaining familial, economic, and cultural ties across international borders, in effect making the home and host societies a single arena of social action” (Foner 1997a, p. 355). They are the “transmigrants”, in Schiller, Basch and Blanc’s words, those “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (Schiller et al. 1999, p. 73). “Simultaneous embeddedness” and “multi-stranded social relations” are part of this “condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders, certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common—however virtual—arena of activity” called “transnationalism” (Vertovec 1999, p. 447). This very much describes the lives of the Chinese migrants in Singapore, who move upon a transnational stage, mapping (and acting out) their lives.

Many respondents indicated that they maintained contact with people back home, especially through the telephone, usually weekly. When asked why they would make these calls, especially when there was very little to talk about and no real news, most simply smiled and remarked that their parents wanted to “hear their voice”. Even though most could not recall the

exact content of these conversations,<sup>19</sup> such calls were nevertheless made regularly, as a symbolic action to maintain family ties, and for pleasure.<sup>20</sup>

Telephone conversations were activities that the family did together, as a whole, to jointly make up transnationality and participate in it. Though physically distant, the scattered members of the family regarded it as something “close to heart”. Talking to each other about the mundane details of their daily lives, even though it might mean spending a huge portion of their income, is essential to reinforcing the idea of the family being there, “with me and for me”.

These weekly telephone exchanges, usually initiated in Singapore, were limited to family members and very close friends, while email was used among friends, ex-classmates, and ex-colleagues. These latter contacts were maintained for both social and economic reasons, serving as informal information sources and for work-related engagements. It was through such links that some of our respondents had been informed of the opportunities in Singapore.

Gift exchanges can also be viewed as a family ritual, performed symbolically to bond the family together by stressing interdependence and mutual help. Although most of the gifts exchanged were available in both countries, they continued to shuttle between two places as if there was a real scarcity of them at either end, or as though the price differential was large enough to justify the mailing costs.

The fact of the commodity’s availability and the lack of a price gap apparently was lost on people engaging in gift exchanges, suggesting that gifts were significant in terms of emotive ties and attachments. Gift exchange had little to do with the need for a specific item, but much with the meaning attributed to gift giving. A gift was the “heart” of the sender, and wrapped up within it was the sender’s love. In this way gifts were also about the ideological construction and reproduction of “the family”.

Migrants also made return trips to China at regular intervals. Once a year, on average, these migrants returned to re-establish family ties, to reconnect with the sending country and those who remained. Contrary to what some might think with regard to social controls loosening for migrants, these visits continually renewed and tightened social bonds. Although not everyone was enthusiastic about such home visits, where the returning migrant preoccupied himself or herself with relatives and friends, having meals together and updating each other about everyday life, most carried them out like a mission. The mission was to rebuild family solidarity and tie oneself, one more time, to the ideal of the family. Sometimes family representatives were sent over, usually the female adults. Migrants had ambivalent feelings about these trips. Most did not see them as “exciting”, but as “tiring”. The women seemed more appreciative of such trips although many agreed such home visits were “exhausting” or “boring”, about nothing but sitting around and eating; but they also saw them as “emotionally fulfilling”. They could have vacationed elsewhere, but invariably, they went back to China.

Transnationalism and its practices provide an interpretation of a migrant’s experiences:

Now, you don’t think of a family as three generations living together under one roof anymore .... I don’t feel that I’m not part of the family by being away .... I still keep in contact with them as much as I can; it doesn’t matter where I am .... I always visit my parents every year .... (Min, single woman, 35).

We still do things together .... If I have any problem, I’ll discuss it with my family ... although we don’t live together; we are still together at heart ... we still frequently communicate through whatever means .... (Dong, single woman, 30).

Migrant families can insert themselves into this transnational space, and the migrants, with this sociological or even existential knowledge, act accordingly. The migrant’s conscious conduct in everyday life is articulated against the background of an awareness of this space. Contrary to what one of our respondents said about becoming less bounded and controlled by the social network back home, and the result being an increased divorce rate among younger couples who had lost their roots, familial control does not necessarily decrease with distance.

<sup>19</sup> Such conversations went like this: “How’s everyone been?”; “How’s your health?”; “Any problems?”.

<sup>20</sup> It was usually the wives who made the phone calls, not the husbands.



Transnationality is apparent in the adaptation in a migrant's everyday life, and in the migrant's concept of the two countries. The imagery of uprooting and assimilating has weakened. The migrant no longer either adapts to fit into the new society, or returns to the old one: the migrant may travel back and forth between the two countries, or even go on to a third country. Living in the host country takes on a new perspective as the migrant explores and opens up new options. "Home" is no longer locally restricted nor is assimilation compulsory. While feelings for the "motherland" still play a significant role in how these migrants speak of China, transnationality encourages them to look to a place as yet unknown. Transnationality is about imagination, fantasy, and desire.

But transnationality cannot always grant the migrant's desire. Perceived as a phenomenon that "preceded 'the nation'" (Vertovec 1999, p. 447), transnationalism has been glamorised by researchers who fantasise it as an alternative to the nation-state. Transnationalism carries too many promises it cannot fulfil, at least not yet. Although the pitfalls of transnationalism have been discussed (Portes et al. 1999), its down sides have been ignored. A transnational lifestyle, though much celebrated in the recent literature, remains out of reach for those without the resources. This discrepancy in ownership of resources might result in a wider gap separating the transnationalistic and the local, the "home bound".

Access to transnational lifestyle is not equal for everyone in the family either. The elderly might not have the skills to connect themselves with the world through the Internet; some don't even know how to make a long-distance telephone call. Access to science and technology is kept under the control of their adult children. Male adults undoubtedly have more power in the transnational space; they hold the key to the brave new world.

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## Conclusion

In this chapter, a conscious effort has been made to make sense of the Chinese migrant family. Although there have been family studies and migration studies for decades, they have been conducted separately; the hybrid of these two areas would yield fruitful results. In an age of

vibrant motion, when migration is part and parcel of everyday life, the scope of family studies remains limited without attention to those moving. The number of migrant families is significant, and refuting a place for them erases one part of the real social world. Likewise, as migration studies begin to establish themselves, it is also important to take into account the family, to add value to the analysis. Intertwining the two social phenomena, migration and the family, gives birth to this study.

From the macroscopic structural contexts, including economic climate, immigration and emigration policies, to the micro-individual, personal motives, contemporary human migrations result from a wide range of forces. The Chinese migrants, too, move with varied agendas. Parallel to the hypothesis that migration is not a haphazard but calculated move, with only those with the resources able to realize the idea of moving, no migration is undertaken simply because of a set of push and pull factors, nor is it based purely on economic rationality. Individual migrants work out their decisions from within the contexts of families, though the power that each person has to negotiate his or her position within the family differs.

In family migration, not everyone benefits, but complaints from some sectors are almost never heard: most people speak of a positive gain in moving. Those who disagree, such as children and "trailing" wives, are muted by constraints within the family structure or even by researchers, albeit unintentionally. Family migration has long been studied as a collective move, with everyone in the family taken as part of a whole. Although recently the oppressive nature of family relationships has been reinserted into studies of migrant families, the power of the family to generate norms for its members to abide by, without the individuals themselves being aware of it, is still largely ignored. The family as a site for justifications remains understudied.

In family migration, the image of the "trailing spouse" conveys the idea of a wife following her husband. While this imagery accounts for the bulk of this chapter, husbands "trail" too, but their numbers are fewer. In our study the analytical focus has been shifted from the male's point

of view to the female's, possibly also leading to another bias in that direction.

Like the trailing husbands who explain their situation to make it appear that they are not really trailing their wives, migrants who suffer from dislocation or a fall in status, at work or within the family, may resort to an air-tight system of rationalisations to allow themselves to read their plight more positively.

As well as wives, children and the elderly usually migrate to "follow" their family. Children are never consulted about migration, whereas the elderly are asked for their opinion out of respect, but often not until they have been informed of their adult children's plan to migrate. They are seldom consulted initially. It is no surprise that their presence in the research has been infinitesimal. As dependants, grandparents and grandchildren have little or no say in whatever decisions are made about migration. Their silence is further glossed over by images of the cosy and loving family, of adults moving for the good of their children, to provide them with a better future, and of the elderly enjoying a blissful retirement with the family, instead of being left behind in China.

The idea of family varies from person to person. Women generally have a wider definition than men of who should be included in it. This definition in turn influences how individuals engage in family-related activities such as maintaining transnational networks. Such activities, transcending national borders, have intensified with the use of new technologies, while the traditional modes of bonding and communication continue to have a symbolic value.

By moving, a migrant supposedly breaks free from the bondage of the family; many studies indeed celebrate migration as emancipatory. But the idea of the family is powerful, and becomes more so when the family must stick together as a cohesive unit, as when faced with a common "enemy"—the hostile or at least strange conditions in the host country. Even when the migrant is physically away from the family, he or she is not a free-floating individual, but is still tied to the family "back home". Though often construed as something that transcends national boundaries,

transnationalism thus far has failed to transcend the moral compass of the family. The Chinese migrants in Singapore spend most of their time reproducing the "reality" of "family togetherness", thus tightening the bond to the family still in China. Making sense of migrant families will involve looking at the family as a collection of individuals in relationships, not a single entity; seeing which individuals have "gotten lost" in the move; and then reinserting the lost selves back into the family drama.

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# Reforming Family Among Remigrants: Hongkongers Come Home

Nan M. Sussman

## Demographic Landscape: Who, How Many, and Where?

Migration from China has a long history echoing internal cycles of political, social, and economic upheavals. Population and immigration statistics are difficult to verify in twentieth-century China. Separate and more accessible records have been maintained for Hong Kong once it became a British territory in 1868. This chapter will briefly review Chinese immigration from the late-twentieth century and the social scientific research findings regarding the psychological adaptation of Chinese migrants to their re-settlement countries, in particular, Canada, Australia, and the USA. Adjustment to the West included not only food, dress, and language but the cultural values which form the underpinnings of family life. The majority of the chapter will explore how these personal transformations affected parent-child relations and other familial roles and interactions which became salient upon return home. The experiences of 50 return migrants, captured in interviews through the Hong Kong Remigration Project, will be presented as they attempted to raise their bicultural, multilingual children, renew relationships with parents and siblings, find schools and residences, and negotiate the balance between family and professional lives, and between Western and Chinese familial relationships.

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## Chinese Migration

Although the exact figures are not known, hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Mainland China, due to war, repression, and deprivation, left from the early nineteenth century to 1949. They settled predominantly in North and South America, building the railroads and other massive construction projects. Following the Communist Revolution, mass immigrations were sporadic until the early 1960s when about 100,000 immigrants fled to Hong Kong followed by another 200,000 in the late 1970s. In the mid-1980s as relations between the People's Republic of China and the USA thawed, immigration increased. The turn of the twenty-first century has seen a marked increase in immigration from the PRC. Since 2000, Canada has received between 30,000 and 40,000 Chinese immigrants yearly and the USA has received ~50,000 per year.

## Hong Kong Migration

Immigration from Hong Kong was steady but low during most of the second half of the twentieth century. Government reports indicate that in the 1970s, the yearly averages were 1,400 immigrated to Australia; 8,200 to Canada; and 12,000 to the USA (Skeldon 1995). All of that changed dramatically in the early 1980s.

On July 1, 1997, sovereignty of Hong Kong reverted to the People's Republic of China after 150 years of British rule. Since 1984, when the

Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed by the Prime Ministers of the PRC and the UK, anxiety spread through the territory. This bastion of free-wheeling capitalism and adherence to the British rule of law would soon be governed by the communist party leaders in Beijing and the residents of the city would be monitored by the People's Liberation Army. Hongkongers, around dining tables at home and hallways in offices, debated what life would be like under mainland rule and whether they wanted to stay in Hong Kong.

Thousands of Hong Kong residents decided that the risks of staying were too great; migration soared from 22,400 per year in 1980 to a high of 66,000 in 1992 (Wong 1999), although demographer Ronald Skeldon suggests that this government figure underestimates the emigration by 10–15% (Skeldon 1994). He estimates that total outflow of Hongkongers from 1987 to 1992 was more than 300,000. The Tiananmen Square demonstrations spiked the emigration flow further. More inclusive figures from 1984 to 1997 indicate that close to 600,000 emigrated from Hong Kong (Hong Kong government). The latest data collected from the Australian, Canadian, and U.S. governments plus estimates of emigration to other countries puts the grand total at ~800,000 (Sussman 2010).

This late twentieth-century emigration differed from earlier emigrations in more than the quantitative dimension. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century immigrants were primarily rural, lacking formal education, representing the poor and working class. These were the Hongkongers who established the world's Chinatowns and opened restaurants and shops. In contrast, immigration in the 1980–1990s was primarily urban, highly educated, middle and upper class. For example, in 1993, 5.2% of Hongkongers held university degrees; yet 15% of those who emigrated were university graduates. Similarly, 12% of the total population was employed in high-level occupations; yet 35.5% of the immigrants were professionals. Hand-over immigrants also differed from the immigrants of early periods by frequently including multiple generations of a family rather than a husband migrating alone (Skeldon 1994).

Immigrant families obtained visas to traditional “settler” countries including the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia along with neighboring countries such as Singapore and more exotic locales like Fiji, Panama, and Lesotho. Decisions to depart from Hong Kong coincided with changes in immigration policies in a number of countries which served to funnel the immigrants either towards or away from those destinations. Combined, Canada, Australia, and the USA accounted for more than 80% of the total number of immigrants during the initial period of immigration (1987–1993).

Canada received more than 185,000 Hongkongers during that time period, quadrupling the immigration from the prior seven years (Skeldon 1994). Australia received 75,000, increasing its number of Hong Kong immigrants threefold. The U.S. received 92,000, only a minor increase over the prior period, at a rate of 10,000 permanent visas granted per year under the Family Reunification Act (Kang 1997). Despite commonalities among these settler countries, the Hong Kong emigrant experiences varied widely.

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## Hongkongers Adjusting to the West

It is important to note that prior to immigration, the Hong Kong family was already in a state of flux having been shaped in the past 200 years by multiple cultural foundations and buffeted by changing political winds. Although most residents describe their cultural identity as “Hongkongers” (DeGolyer 2007), 98% are Chinese in origin and tradition. Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and myriad folk beliefs formed the core of familial structure and interactions while 150 years of British cultural exposure spread modern concepts of parent–child relations or spousal roles and communication (Chan and Lee 1995). Family ideals have also been transformed by contact with widely varying political models notably imperial autocracy, Western democracy and British colonial rule. In yet another realm of familial cross-currents, contemporary Hongkongers meld scientific rationality with traditional superstitions involving ancestor worship,



*qi*, and *feng shui*. Thus, as immigrants departed from home, they carried with them far from a unified and solidified implicit theory of the ideal family but multiple strands formed from diverse ideologies and beliefs.

Immigrants, in general, found themselves in countries that differed dramatically from Hong Kong in many ways. One of the significant physical changes between Hong Kong and the Western countries of emigration is the density levels. Hong Kong is among the most densely populated territories on earth, averaging 6,380/square kilometer. The USA averages 31/square kilometer. And the countries which experienced the most immigration from Hong Kong are among the most sparsely populated: both Canada and Australia average 3/square kilometer (UN population division 2004). Canada, Australia, and the USA share other psychological features, chief among them are similar values and attitudes toward family relations.

### Western and Chinese Value Differences Affecting Families

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch organizational psychologist, in his groundbreaking work on differing cultural values, categorized dozens of values into five dimensions (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Individual ratings on each of the dimensions collectively describe the value orientations of a country. The five value dimensions are individualism vs. collectivism; power distance; masculine–feminine;

uncertainty avoidance; and long-term vs. short-term orientation. Between 1974 and 2002, Hofstede and his colleagues rated more than 70 countries on these five dimensions. Table 4.1 enumerates the ratings on each dimension for China, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia, and the USA.

Country-specific ratings on each dimension, which highlight a culture’s predominant values, have profound influence on family relationships and roles. A substantial gap between China/Hong Kong values and those of the West are evident in three dimensions and some differences, albeit more moderate, in a fourth.

### Individualism vs. Collectivism

This dimension summarizes values which relate to the role of the individual vs. the role of the family in the self-concept of an individual. Chinese values emphasize an intertwined and embedded self where the role of the family, defined as parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins pervades all aspects of behavior. Living together, often in multi-generational residences, fosters strong loyalty and sharing of resources. Families pool funds to educate the next generation so that students can concentrate on their studies. Family rituals of births, weddings, and funerals are attended by all family members. Children are raised thinking of the collective “we” and avoiding conflict and confrontation as these are considered rude. Preserving harmony takes precedence over individual needs. Maintaining the honor of the family and “face” is crucial in Chinese society. A Hong Kong sociologist

**Table 4.1** Value dimensions by country

	China	Hong Kong	Canada	Australia	United States
Individualism–Collectivism <sup>a</sup>	20	25	80	90	91
Power distance <sup>b</sup>	80	68	39	36	40
Masculine–Feminine <sup>c</sup>	66	57	52	61	62
Uncertainty avoidance <sup>d</sup>	30	29	48	51	46
Long-term vs. Short-term orientation <sup>e</sup>	118	96	23	31	29

<sup>a</sup>Higher number denotes more individualism

<sup>b</sup>Higher number denotes high power distance

<sup>c</sup>Higher number denotes more masculine

<sup>d</sup>Higher number denotes more uncertainty avoidance

<sup>e</sup>High number denotes more long-term orientation



explained that “face is lost when the individual... fails to meet essential requirements placed on him by virtue of the social position that he occupies” and often brings shame to the family (Ho 1976, p. 867). Thus, the family forms the core of social and economic structure and daily pursuits.

In Hong Kong, while the extended family maintains strong ties to each other through frequent social contacts, the nuclear family is by far the most common living situation (62% according to a 1991 census). However, the close emotional and economic bonds with kin result in a “modified nuclear system” (Chan and Lee 1995) that does not bear the imprint of social isolation which is frequently found in this reduced family grouping.

Western values place individual needs separate and ahead of those of the family, which is defined as parents and siblings. Children are taught to think in terms of “I” and to speak their individual opinions even if they disagree with family or other adults. Resources are accumulated primarily for individual use and children are encouraged to earn money at a young age and attain financial independence from their families by early adulthood. Languages spoken in individualistic cultures require speakers to use the pronoun “I” when referring to themselves; it is interesting to note that English is the only language in which this pronoun is capitalized. Most collectivist cultures, however, drop the pronoun “I” in conversation (Kashima and Kashima 1998).

### **Low Power Distance vs. High**

There are inequalities in every society but cultures deal with these differently. The extent to which less powerful people within a culture accept inequalities in status, power, and wealth has been labeled power distance (PD) and is a dimension that encompasses many values. Some cultures try to minimize or offset inequalities; these are referred to as low PD countries. There is a preference for consultation and discussion among these people. Western countries tend to score low on PD. Other cultures accept or maintain inequalities through family, social, and professional behaviors; these are referred to as high PD countries. In these countries, subordinates are

dependent on their superiors; China and to a lesser extent Hong Kong score high on PD.

Learning to embrace low or high PD begins early in childhood and is modeled by parents and teachers. A firm hierarchical order is imposed in the Chinese family with parents and other elders accorded the highest respect followed by obedience to older children by younger ones. Respect is reciprocated by warm and nurturing care of children by parents; of younger siblings by older ones. Obedience to and dependence on parents and teachers come with the knowledge that children will care for them in their old age. These inequities and reciprocities are expected and desired. The Confucius term filial piety can be applied to these Chinese values which include obedience, courtesy, reverence, loyalty and unequal but reciprocal relationships within the family, especially to elders. The absolute order has been moderated among those modified nuclear Hong Kong families with strict patriarchal structures replaced by more egalitarian, sharing, and emotionally supportive parents although the husband–father remains the titular head of the family (Chan and Lee 1995).

In low PD countries, parents and children, teachers and students have more equitable relationships. This permits young people to question the authority of seniors, disagree with their decisions, and in fact, make choices with which parents and teachers may not agree. At a young age, children are asked for their opinions and preferences and they engage in negotiations with parents and teachers. Some recent research demonstrated that, in contrast to Asian students, American students preferred activities that gave them more choice rather than less and more specifically, that they should be the sole decision-makers of their college majors and career paths.

### **Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation**

This value dimension was conceived by Hong Kong psychologist Michael Bond and colleagues (Chinese Culture Connection 1987) and was later added to Hostede’s four categories. While both poles of this dimension encompass Confucian values, long-term orientation stresses

those focusing on the future such as persistence, thrift, a sense of shame, and the role of status in ordering relationships. Short-term orientation values focus on the past or present and include respect for tradition, personal stability, and reciprocity. China and Hong Kong score very high on long-term orientation where delay of gratification is encouraged and relationships including the choice of marriage partners are pragmatic; living with in-laws is an outgrowth of these values as well. The practical attitude of Hongkongers combined with persistence affects the educational preference of most students toward applied and concrete sciences and the rewards of hard work. Industriousness is modeled and reinforced. Success is attributed to effort rather than luck or ability.

For Westerners, who primarily score high on short-term orientation, the focus is on the present. Enjoyment, leisure time pursuits, and relaxation balance work life, which is seen primarily as a means to an end. Parents, too, want to pursue their own goals, whether for professional or self-improvement, and place, albeit reluctantly, their young children or elderly parents in the care of others. Success, in contrast to the Hongkonger, is attributed to those with innate ability or good fortune, thereby undercutting the necessity of hard work and effort. Students and teachers equally believe that if mathematics understanding does not come easy, then hours of study will not have positive results.

### **Uncertainty Avoidance**

Life is filled with unpredictable events and uncertainty. Each culture has developed values which either attempt to minimize uncertainty or to accept life's ambiguities by approaching situations with flexibility. Societal responses are frequently in the realm of laws and religion. The scores of China and Hong Kong are among the lowest on this dimension. Anxiety levels are low, alcohol consumption is relatively low, and emotional reactivity is low. In examining similar constructs, Chinese score high on the dimension of Agreeableness on the Big Five personality tests that combines the traits of trust, compliance, modesty, and caring. Languages in low UA

(uncertainty avoidance) countries tend to have fewer rules and more choices, such as multiple tones and meanings for the same word in Mandarin or Cantonese. In general, people in low UA see the world as more benevolent and less dangerous, and experiencing novel situations is encouraged. New ideas, people, and places are not shunned but embraced. Perhaps these values explain why Chinese and Hongkongers have been among the largest immigrant groups in the past century; fear of the unknown does not keep them in their villages and towns.

Western countries score higher in UA than does Hong Kong, but still moderate in comparison to the other countries evaluated. High UA cultures see the world as more dangerous and parents are protective of their children. Levels of anxiety are higher and there is fear of ambiguous situations. People tend to be more expressive of both positive and negative emotions within the family setting. Children are controlled through guilt, an internalization and self-comparison of what is clearly wrong and right behavior and the concept of sin is well developed in the religions of high UA countries.

### **Masculine-Feminine**

There are the smallest differences between China/Hong Kong and the Western countries on this dimension. The values of this category focus on the extent to which males and females have similar roles in life (gender overlap), referred to as feminine countries, or different roles and behaviors (gender distinct), masculine countries. The former puts emphasis on relationships (irrespective of whether people are in the same family or group); the latter puts emphasis on ego. In the workplace, masculine cultures stress opportunities for high earnings, recognition for a job well done, potential for advancement, and challenging work. All five countries under examination are moderately masculine and one would expect more gender overlap than distinctiveness. What is significant for the workplace is how the values of this gender dimension intersect with the individualism–collectivism one. Hong Kong is moderately masculine and collectivist whereas the USA, Canada, and Australia are moderately mas-

culine and highly individualistic. In Hong Kong, therefore, emphasis is on survival and concern for group (company or family) success while being competitive. In the West, emphasis is on individual success. The MAS/collectivist combination also provides values support in Hong Kong where the extended family plays a prominent role in raising children whereas in the West, child rearing is the role of the parents alone or even a single parent.

What is significant for family life is the intersection of MAS with PD: in Hong Kong with moderate masculine and moderately high PD, the norm is unequal family relationships (father and mother; parent and child) with tough fathers/parents expecting obedience and mothers who can be both submissive and tough. In the Western countries, with smaller PD and moderately masculine, one would expect neither parent more dominant than the other but fathers emphasizing rational thought and mothers focusing on feelings.

It is clear from these value comparisons that Hong Kong immigrants to Canada, Australia, and the USA were soon to face a very different social landscape relating to family relations. How would they cope with these differences, and how would it affect the relations between husbands and wives, parents and children, the elder and the younger generations, students and teachers? One might predict, based on the low uncertainty avoidance values, that Hong Kong immigrants would be flexible, adapt fairly easily to their new cultural milieu, and experience little anxiety. In light of the Chinese–Western value differences and subsequent adaptations, how would cultural adjustments to the West produce family transformations upon return to Hong Kong?

But first, it is important to note that Western countries were not replicas of each other in social history or psychological paradigms and immigrant experiences differed, marginally in some domains, and substantially in others. The shift from unaccompanied male immigrants in the nineteenth century to multi-generation families in the 1980s led to varied adjustment patterns during the acculturation process. Children straddled two cultural milieu: adapting to the cultural values of their newly made local friends and to

school environments while maintaining the ethnic values of their parents at home. Inevitable conflicts arose. Husbands and wives had differential adaptations as well. Men needed to adjust to a workplace requiring more open and revealing opinions, flatter organizational relationships (fewer managers) with minimized status differences between managers and subordinates, and a slower and less-driven work style. Women were thrust into domestic situations without the assistance of domestic help, increased responsibility for child rearing and shopping and running a household, mostly in English.

### Canadian Settlement

As the recipient of the largest number of Hong Kong immigrants, Canadians found themselves in the midst of the largest single-country influx in their history. Hong Kong moved from a tenth place ranking in 1971 as an immigration source country to first place in 1987 (Johnson and Lary 1994) and the immigration category shifted from family to economic. The sheer volume was multiplied in its effect in that the majority moved to either the west coast province of British Columbia or to Ontario in the middle of the country. While the Canadians needed to adjust to their new neighbors, Hongkongers needed to adjust to cold climates, new language, and new culture. Chinese culturally derived social networks were the first line of assistance. Voluntary Chinese associations, initially formed to provide aid to the rural, unskilled mid-nineteenth-century gold rush immigrants, continued their efforts to assist the well-educated professionals during the difficult preliminary adjustment period in Vancouver, Toronto, and other cities that experienced large-scale immigration (Johnson and Lary 1994). These associations were modeled on those found in villages throughout China.

A recent study compared similarities and differences in acculturation among parents and children of immigrant Chinese families in Canada (Costigan and Dokis 2006). Three domains of acculturation were investigated. Behavioral practices included Chinese and Canadian language use and media preferences among other overt

actions. Ethnic identity assessed the strength of feelings of belongingness to Chinese ethnicity. Cultural values measured the extent to which the families embraced Chinese or Canadian qualities (e.g., family cohesion vs. individualism). Overall, and not unexpectedly, children were more open to adopting the behaviors (speaking English and using English media) and values (more independent) of the Canadians than were their parents. Surprisingly, though, parents were only marginally more committed to Chinese culture than their children. The families exhibited the most similarities to each other among the ethnic identity and Asian values dimensions suggesting that, at home, parents were particularly concerned about transmitting aspects of Chinese culture. Interestingly, while children received and integrated Chinese values into their identities, their behavior frequently reflected Canadian ideals, an example of the duality and integrative flexibility of Chinese self-concept.

Demographic distinctiveness did not break down only along age lines. Adults themselves did not hold uniform values and beliefs. One unexpected finding was the difference between mothers and fathers on most of the cultural dimensions. Mothers were more oriented toward Chinese culture and identity while fathers favored Canadian ones. These results had consequences for familial relationships, particularly in light of the differential residency in Canada of mothers vs. fathers. Mothers were more likely to be the sole caretaker of the family in Canada, as we will see, while the fathers returned to Hong Kong.

Immigration has multiple constituents, both individual and institutional, social and cultural. Acculturation to Canada by Hong Kong immigrants must be seen against the backdrop of the prevalent Canadian philosophy of multiculturalism. The tenets of this concept permitted and subtly encouraged the private maintenance of ethnic values while simultaneously insisting on minimal public adherence to Canadian behaviors and to Canadian values. An example of the outcome of this model was found in a study of immigrants from The Netherlands to Canada compared with those who immigrated to Australia and the USA (Van Oudenhoven 2006). Immigrants to

Canada were far more likely to identify themselves as Canadian, identify with an integrative acculturation strategy (that is, maintaining both home and host culture values and attitudes) and be less marginalized than similar immigrants to the other two countries. In a similar study, Punjabi Sikhs were better acculturated to Canada than to Australia and the UK (Ghuman 1994).

Chan Kwok-bun, a prominent Hong Kong sociologist argues, however, that within the Hong Kong Canadian community, women and younger immigrants in particular, preferred an alternative to multiculturalism, claiming that "...the hyphen remains a hyphen forever. The multicultural policy has effectively prevented the hyphen (Chinese-Canadian) from being removed and replaced by an arrow (Chinese → Canadian)." (Chan 2004, p. 236). Chan advocates a philosophy that would allow Hong Kong immigrants to better integrate and fuse Chinese and Canadian values, to experience "inclusion and exclusion, togetherness and separation, certainty and adventure, living out his life at the borders" (p. 241) through hybridizing behavior, identity, and values.

Canada and Canadians also have been transformed by the Hong Kong migration in both small, intimate ways and huge, institutional structures. New urban development projects such as Pacific Place connected Hong Kong and Vancouver and shifted Canadian linkages from northern Europe to the Pacific Rim (Olds 1998). The Canadian preferences for modest homes surrounded by lawns, trees, and shrubbery reflected the national value placed on open spaces and natural beauty. Hong Kong immigrants, longing for internal space denied them when living in the colony, purchased existing homes in Vancouver or Toronto, razed them and replaced them with big houses fitting the footprint of the building lots to the edges. Canadian neighbors chafed at the changes while Hongkongers luxuriated in multi-bedroom, multi-bathroom mansions. Who needed a lawn!

## Australian Settlement

Australia received the largest per capita number of Hongkongers, who gained entry under the

Independent Skills program (based on educational and occupation skills) and by 1990, they became Australia's largest source of non-English speaking immigrants, jumping up from 21st ranking in 1980 (Pookong and Skeldon 1994). In 1991–1992, categorizing immigrants by place of last residence, Hong Kong was the number one source with 15,656 new settlers. The total number of Hong Konger-born residents also dramatically increased from 1,554 in 1954 to 80,000 in 1993 (Pookong and Skeldon 1994). In a comparative study of Asia immigrants to Brisbane, Australia, which included 23 Hongkongers, parameters of this sub-group were described and they deviated noticeably from immigrants from the PRC, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam. Most respondents were married to other Hongkongers, only half had children, and most owned their own homes or apartments in neighborhoods described as middle/upper socio-economic level. Nearly half of the Hong Kong respondents had visited Australia prior to immigrating and indicated that physical attributes of the environment (climate, clean, open spaces) were important factors in selecting Australia as the immigration destination. Mostly university-educated, they were employed as professionals (Wu et al. 1998).

While geographically proximal to Hong Kong, Australia offered differences in climate, topography, history, employment opportunities, and culture. A critical aspect of the adjustment was economic, posing the question of whether these highly educated immigrants would find appropriate jobs within the Australian labor force. Anita Mak, a Hong Kong-born psychologist, partly educated in Hong Kong and partly in Australia, conducted an in-depth study of 111 Hong Kong Chinese who settled in Australia (Mak 2001). These mid-career professionals, both men and women, included newcomers (less than 3½ years in Australia) and settlers (3½–10 years). Somewhat unexpectedly, two-thirds of the respondents were able to find positions in the same occupation as in Hong Kong although many subsequently found career advancement blocked. Two-thirds of the respondents also indicated that while generally satisfied with their jobs, they were uncertain or dissatisfied about career development.

Nearly a quarter of the interviewees needed further study in a new academic area in order to secure a job and obstacles to finding relevant employment were particularly evident in engineering, teaching, and management.

Cross-cultural differences between the two countries were revealed most clearly in the employment arena. Study participants perceived that limitations in both finding pertinent employment and in career promotion were fueled by racial discrimination, under-valuing of Hong Kong education and work experience, language barriers, and lack of local knowledge. Australian cultural values influenced workplace interactions and customs, leading to the need for adjustments on the part of the immigrants. Hofstede found significant differences between Hong Kong and Australia (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). On the continuum of collectivism (0) to individualism (100), Hong Kong scored a 25 (ranked 53) (more collectivist) while Australia scored a 90 (and was ranked 2) (more individualist). These differences were manifest in the relationship that the workers felt toward the work institution and the amount of time and energy that would be spent on behalf of the institution. Hongkongers were accustomed to working long hours, 6–7 days a week, and socializing with co-workers in the evening (eating, drinking, playing mah-jong). These behaviors were cultural signifiers and represented a strong connection to the work group. Their hard work would support and maintain the organization which in turn would reward the employee.

For Hongkongers, the balance of work life to family life inevitably fell on the side of work. For Australian workers, the balance fell on the side of family and personal leisure. In individualist-Australia, the work day and the work week were short and individual effort was modest. Immigrants were often troubled by what they perceived as a weak work ethic and lack of concern about the organization. Conversely, Australians negatively attributed the workplace dedication and persistence of the Hong Kong immigrant to cloying deference to the boss or to unfortunate lack of concern for family.

Respondents in the Mak study indicated that other problematic cultural differences included



uncomfortably democratic work relationships between supervisor and subordinate, and open expression of opinions. External factors, such as the struggling state of the Australian economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, also resulted in dissatisfaction with financial compensation. One-third of the respondents were considering a return to Hong Kong. Not all cultural differences were met with distress, however. Increased workplace autonomy and responsibility resulted in increased satisfaction among the Hong Kong immigrants.

Overall, Hong Kong immigrants were happier with their personal and family life than they were with their jobs in Australia. The search for career satisfaction as well as the challenges of raising school-aged children, appeared to be significant factors in immigrants' decision to remain in Australia.

### United States Settlement

Hongkongers who emigrated to the USA did so under the family re-unification policy. Therefore, these immigrants had "private" mutual assistance groups ready to ease their acculturative stress. Despite the existence of supporting family and friends, the majority of social scientific research on the Hong Kong immigrant group focused on the effects of acculturation on a wide variety of psychological outcomes. Few consistent findings enable us to generalize about the acculturation process for the Hongkongers in the USA. Some studies demonstrated that acculturation levels (that is, the extent to which an individual acculturated to US society) did not affect depression levels (Soh 2003) while others indicate that those immigrants with lower acculturation to the USA had higher expectations about the expertise of psychological counselors (Shih 2001). A more nuanced result indicated that the amount of stress related to acculturation was influenced by whether an immigrant held an internal vs. external Chinese identity (Kwan 1997).

An anthropological study, which used a case study method rather than an experimental one (Ong 1999), discussed Hong Kong immigrants planned and intentional strategies to not only

adjust to life in California but to fit within the upper social class and monied elites. Through interviews and observations, this author revealed that the immigrants used multiple tactics including the selection of the "right" private schools, self-improvement lessons (tennis, golf, music lessons, chess tutoring), purchasing or building homes in geographically desirable locations (from both a local and a *feng shui* perspective), and philanthropic donations and leadership volunteerism with favored charities and cultural institutions.

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### Hongkongers Coming Home

Safely watching from their homes in Sydney, Vancouver, or Los Angeles, Hong Kong immigrants observed the handover ceremonies and its aftermath. The People's Liberation Army quietly ensconced itself in the barracks in Stanley and its soldiers wore civilian clothes when they ventured into Central. Banks and financial service industries cautiously continued their business unimpeded and the economy gradually rebounded. Between 1984 and 1997, nearly 800,000 Hongkongers emigrated from the territory, a sixth of the population. This historic exodus was matched by an equally unrivaled event: since 1997, the return to Hong Kong by an estimated 500,000 immigrants, now as citizens of Canada, Australia, the USA, the UK, and more than a dozen other Western and Asian nations. Hongkongers were coming home.

### Astronauts and Boomerangs

The current wave of Hongkongers predominantly immigrated as multi-generation families and their middle-class and highly educated status made them distinct from immigrant groups from the past. Their return to Hong Kong was clearly distinctive as well. It began with the men. Many men were dissatisfied with their immigrant jobs, with the outlook for career advancement, and most disturbingly, their low financial compensation. The salient option was to return to Hong Kong where the economy was expanding, the labor pool



depleted, and the salaries high. With an eye toward the future and their characteristic flexibility, immigrant men had maintained their Hong Kong workplace networks throughout their overseas re-settlement, communicating often with university friends, co-workers, and supervisors. Hong Kong businesses were in dire need of skilled and experienced workers due to the recent exodus and were luring immigrants back to Hong Kong with enticing compensation packages.

But who should return? Just the husband? The entire family? Only the parents, leaving the grandparents to care for the children in the settler country? Parents and children, leaving the grandparents as placeholders, remaining in the newly purchased home? All varieties were tried. The patterns varied in format and over time.

Initially, it saw the family remaining in the new homeland with the exception of the husbands who accepted employment in Hong Kong. Often this option was undertaken temporarily with the expectation that the men would return frequently to their new homeland to visit the family and conversely, the family would return to Hong Kong during school holidays and the summer. Thus was born the Hong Kong “astronaut” or *Taai hung yahn*. A play on words, this term can be translated as “man without a wife.” These men flying back and forth between Hong Kong and Vancouver or Sydney led bi-national lives while their “satellite” families struggled to adjust to a new culture and a new identity. The long-term strategy was clear although rarely realized—after a year or so the solo husbands would earn enough in Hong Kong to boomerang back to their families and their settlement country.

While these astronaut tactics were born of economic underemployment (Hughes and Chu 1993), there were psychological motivations as well. In the settler country, husbands not only felt the pinch of declining income. There was the ego-deflating effect of less prestigious jobs which often necessitated the wives seeking employment. The possibility of lowered self-esteem surely was behind the comments of a male returnee: “When you are not able to find a job, or earn enough money or work at your former position, especially for a male, they’ll feel that they are useless. Some

people who are used to being a boss, after they went to Canada they had to distribute newspapers or to work as a driver for a living. As their social class lowered dramatically, they also suffered serious psychological depression. I think, other than money, this is another important reason why many have returned to Hong Kong” (Ley and Kobayashi 2005, p. 122).

*Tai kong* can also be defined by its two Chinese characters to mean lonely or solitary wife (Chan 2005). With their husbands absent for months at a time, the traditionally more submissive wives took on the role of leading the household, raising the children, and making dozens of trivial and important decisions without the input of their spouses. The family structure and dynamics were altering. Leung (1992) reported that marital discord was increasing as was emotional distance between fathers and children.

As migration changes the social landscape of a country in the domains of social structure, religion, language, and politics (Ong et al. 1995) so can return migration. Remigrants have altered their values and beliefs about family life, the relationship between husbands and wives, parents and children, and siblings, and the core relationships of traditional Chinese culture.

One might speculate that social institutions of marriage and divorce can be shattered through the experience of migration and the return to Hong Kong. In a study on women’s divorce experiences in Hong Kong, it was found that in 1984 the divorce rate was 0.76 per 1,000 and jumped to 2.0 per 1,000 by 1999 (Kung et al. 2004). Although the investigators suggest many possible explanations, one they did not discuss was the fact that this was the exact time period of the largest return migration. While divorce rates surely have multiple causes, changes in expectations, individual aspirations, and altered geographic arrangements (astronaut phenomenon) of married couples returning to Hong Kong no doubt contributed to the escalating divorce rate.

It is important to note that the extent to which return migrants re-aculturated to Hong Kong values and family interaction patterns hinged on their cultural identification as either a permanent remigrant or as a transnational migrant and their

long-term residential intentions. Those returnees who saw their move to Hong Kong as economically motivated and temporary, developed, as we will see, strategic and prospective plans for their return and that of their children which had consequences for re-settlement issues. However, intentions and actual relocations are not necessarily the same. Longitudinal studies will help us understand the variables which affected the assumption of a transnational or a remigrant life.

### Hong Kong Remigration Project

The Hong Kong Remigration Project was conceived to investigate the psychological and identity consequences of return migration. The methodology for the project combined qualitative semi-structured interviews with quantitative psychological scales measuring overseas adaptation, repatriation stress, life satisfaction, and self-concept. Interviews each lasted 2 hours and consisted of participant responses to a semi-structured interview followed by the completion of a questionnaire packet. The interviews explored the nature of the immigration experience, reasons for returning home, and the remigration experience and included questions about changes in behavior and thinking, perceptions of the remigrant by family, friends and co-workers, and future immigration plans. The questionnaire included the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS) (Diener et al. 1985), the Repatriation Distress Scale (RDS) (Sussman 2001), a modified version of the Birman Cultural Adaptation Scale (Birman and Trickett 2001), the Self-Concept Scale (Singelis 1994), the Twenty Statement Test (Kuhn and McPartland 1954), and demographic items.

The methods chosen for this study were intentionally varied, using the design of triangulation to understand the remigration experiences of the returnees. By utilizing both qualitative inquiry and psychometrically sound quantitative scales, the goal was to increase the confidence in the investigation's findings. The multiple methods support and confirm the results.

In order to recruit remigrants to participate in this study, we used the "snowball sampling"

methods. Two returnees were introduced by friends to the author. They agreed to participate and, following their interviews, they were asked to recommend another returnee. Similar to the snowball that rolls and grows in size, each interviewee made introduction to other potential participants, and the sample grew. Within six months, in 2004, 50 men and women volunteered to assist in the study. These remigrants departed from Hong Kong no earlier than the mid-1980s and returned to Hong Kong after living at least one year in either Canada or Australia. Returnees from these two countries were selected for the sample as these were the most common settler destinations. In a Hong Kong government survey of not returnees (Hong Kong Government survey 2000), 35% had lived in Canada and 24% had lived in Australia or New Zealand. Only 12% were returning from the UK and 11% from the USA.

Some respondents returned to Hong Kong as early as 1986 (as soon as they qualified for citizenship in their new country of abode) and some not until 2003. The age range at the time of immigration was 13–47 years. All but one participant immigrated due to "handover" anxiety—concern about the aftermath of the PRC assuming sovereignty. Reasons for re-migration were slightly more diverse—the majority for economic reasons, a smaller minority concerned with the education of their children (learning Cantonese and Mandarin), and the fewest due to extended family obligations. These reasons closely matched those which were speculated by journalists and Hong Kong social scientists and those which were discovered through empirical research during the past decade.

During the study, 50 respondents were interviewed resulting in over 100 hours of tape-recorded discussion. Each respondent was asked the same questions but the ensuing conversations varied as their differential answers led to unique follow-up questions. The recordings were transcribed and coded for specific information and cultural transition domains. The transcription is exact and does not correct for grammatical mistakes. Occasionally my question to an interviewee or a re-statement of an answer will appear in the text. In this case, it is preceded by an "I" indicating

Interviewer; the interviewee's remarks are signified by the letter "P" indicating participant response. For all the respondents, Cantonese is their first spoken language and English their second one. An English–Cantonese bilingual assistant accompanied the interviewer to the interviews and Chinese (traditional characters) versions of the questionnaire were available. None of the participants chose the Chinese versions nor asked for language help from the research assistant. A fuller description of the project methods and results can be found in Sussman (2010).

### General Emotional Response to Returning Home

Emotional responses to coming home were affected by the amount of time that the remigrant was home. The immediate emotional response was inevitably to the Hong Kong environment. Eighty-two percent of the participants commented on the climate, population density, noise, traffic, and size of the city. In this regard, the unequivocal response was negative. Comparisons with the open green spaces of Australia, the outdoor leisure pursuits available in Canada, the pleasantly moderate humidity, and the low density of their immigration countries, resulted in many returnees finding the Hong Kong environment singularly unappealing.

Once the environmental issues were overcome and accepted, Hong Kong returnees also had a nearly uniform response to returning home but in the opposite direction. They were emotionally upbeat and positive about being home or, at the very least, emotionally neutral. This finding was particularly surprising in light of the data indicating that most of the returnees had not intended to move back to Hong Kong. In this study, long-term emotional reactions to remigration were assessed in three ways: analysis of interviewee comments made during the interview, and scores on two psychological scales. In response to the question "How did you feel when you returned home?", respondents overwhelmingly made remarks such as the following comment from a male who immigrated to Australia at age 28. He recalled

having no problem readjusting to life in Hong Kong. He indicated no signs of emotional distress, but instead...

Participant: It was kind of smooth. I guess I get back to my usual life style almost the same as before I leave. Quite easily. Having lived in Hong Kong for 28 years is a long time that you won't have any problem to get back to the same place.

In fact, respondents were often puzzled by my repeated questioning about "any difficulties in coming home" or "negative perceptions about you by family or friends." Although some respondents indicated that they had changed during the immigration period and had in fact retained some of those new behaviors and attitudes now that they had returned to Hong Kong, it did not cause them identity discomfort nor serious interpersonal difficulties with family and friends.

The lack of repatriation distress was the most unanticipated of the study results in light of the unanimity of negative emotional responses among Western repatriates. Interview narratives which indicated positive or neutral emotional responses were supported by responses on the two psychological scales in the survey administered after the interview. One series of questions, SLS, measured general happiness. Another series of questions measured specific unhappiness related to coming back home and is called the RDS. Examining the SLS, the remigrants produced a high happiness score (average score was 5.1 with 7.0 being the highest happiness score possible). The second measurement of remigration emotional reaction, the RDS, indicated that the remigrants had a below-average distress score to returning home (average score was 2.95 with 7.0 indicating the most distress). Clearly the Hong Kong returnees were not distressed but were feeling happy with their lives and satisfied with their return experience.

The response from this male who immigrated to Canada at age 17 was reflective of this attitude:

Interviewer: The first few months that you are back in Hong Kong, how did you feel? What was the emotional reaction to being here?

Participant: It's great. I think I enjoy this as much as for Hong Kong has changed so much and yet you know you know something like before. It's like sort of a reunion. High school reunion always

got like: I know this person very younger and so I want to know. And to myself it's like that kind of feeling. (I: meet an old friend.) Yes, I know it, and yet I don't know it coz it has changed so much, so it's like everyday it's an adventure.

The research study also investigated how compatriots who did not migrate reacted to the returnees. The majority of the participants responded that their families and friends reacted positively to their return. Another 10% reported that while the Hong Kong residents did not express positive or negative feelings towards them, they did seem to have some awareness of the remigrants' sojourn experience. An even smaller proportion (6%) indicated that they felt misunderstood by the Hong Kong locals. A male who immigrated to Canada at age 13 credited the locals' acceptance of him to his ability to speak the local language:

I: How do you think other people here in Hong Kong view you?

P: My friends accept me as I am. Still have a perfect Cantonese accent and good English too...

Another male who immigrated to Australia at age 30 also reported feeling accepted by family and friends:

P: My mother said, 'oh, you are very good'. Even if you went to Australia for five years, you still can support yourself. I can feel that she appreciate my stay in Australia...

But I can feel that some of my best friends do think that I made a right choice to leave, to go to Australia, the case is that I have the same background with them. Some of my friends think that they didn't have that encouragement to go to another country. So I do think that they do respect my decision.

For one male who immigrated to Australia at age 13, the local response was neither negative nor positive, but simply an observation of the changes in his behavior:

I: When you made new friends in university, did you look for friends who were returnees like you?

P: No, not really. I think it took me not too long to settle back, but a lot of my college friends would told me, "because you done your high school..." They would comment on my personality. (I: What did they say?) I think they said... "guai lou" (meang: foreigner). They would say that I have the personality of "guai chai". (I: What do they mean by that?) More direct I think. To do things differently. Or sometimes I did something outside the norm, they would say, "This is a character of a guai chai".

I: Did they say it good naturedly?

P: Probably neutral, not positive nor negative.

A similar experience was reported by this male who immigrated to Australia at age 33:

I: Did they say to you, "You act differently now"?

P: Yes, they did.

I: In what ways, what did they notice about you?

P: 'You act differently. You act like an Australian or a western people.' They do recognize that. I: Was there anything specific that they notice?

P: Values. Just the value. Materialization. We are not as materialized as they are.

## Husband-and-Wife Relations

As the prior discussion of Chinese values revealed, traditional Chinese culture endows the family relationship with the highest importance. Among the key pairs of relations is the husband–wife dyad, for this is not only the start of a new family, but the continuity of two extended family lines. The central role of women was to bear children, serve her husband's family, maintain the household, and sustain loyalty; the husbands' role was to provide sustenance. Thus, marriage combined reproduction and economics. Preserving the stability and harmony of the newest families were a priority, especially among the husband's family (Kung et al. 2004).

However, 150 years of British rule introduced Western ideas of romantic love and gender equality to husband–wife relationships and the turn of the twenty-first century saw vast changes in the roles of both partners within the marriage. These changes coincided with the societal upheaval of large-scale immigration and remigration.

Prior to the full family remigration to Hong Kong, the boomerang life style predominated. Husbands flew between their country of resettlement and Hong Kong throughout the year while the wives and children joined him in Hong Kong during summer holidays and the Lunar New Year holiday. Eventually, as the initially temporary work situation became permanent, the families chose to re-unite in Hong Kong to preserve the relationships. Time together now proved to be as difficult as time apart.

One female who sojourned to Canada describes her strained relationship with her husband once she returned to Hong Kong. He had returned to Hong Kong some time ago while she remained in Canada:

P: My relationship with my husband is quite difficult to adjust, we separate for a long time that he live his own life and I live with my own life. When I come back I am not so happy because he usually go out mostly of the time, when I come back I want to have somebody to talk, it's quite different for a few months. But after it I just back then it's okay.

Others found the Western model of marriage appealing, in particular the feature of spouses spending considerable leisure time together. The comparison to the Hong Kong style was stark, highlighted by a male interviewee who immigrated to Australia with his wife. Now that they are both back in Hong Kong, and living what he calls a "stressful life," he recalls more enjoyable times spent in Australia:

P: I quite miss the relationship with my wife when we both stayed in Australia we have only two person there, we enjoyed the life and we don't have any working pressure. When we were in Australia, everything was new to us and every Saturdays and Sundays we have visit every place and we enjoy the life.

A female interviewee who returned from Canada with her husband and children describes the changes in her relationship with her husband now that they are back in Hong Kong:

P: Especially when my husband was jobless, we have all the time staying together. We go together to pick up the kids and sometimes we go to market together, even though he also has his own time around the computer. But still we have a lot of time staying with the family. Or the night time, it's not so tired, then we can watch a movie. We can sleep late because if we are tired, we can have some rest during the day. But in Hong Kong, you are very tired, but you still have to go out everyday to do something. That is the different way of life. That's why I found the Hong Kong way of life stressful. Even though on holiday, you are filled up with functions and activities, you would fully utilize your time.

Some returnees, who immigrated when they were teen-agers, found that their adult relationships mimicked those of their destination countries. One remigrant who had immigrated to Canada

when he was 17 and his wife who had moved to the USA when she was eight, described their marriage as more Western than Hong Kong.

P: (I would describe our relationship) as Canadian, I guess. We are quite straight forward to each other and I guess we speak out loud instead of guessing.

## Relations with Elderly Parents, Grandparents, and Siblings

Traditional responsibilities of marriage again became relevant and some returnees, changed by the migration experience, chafed at the expectations of elderly parents and in-laws. One female respondent who, together with her husband, returned from Australia after six years expressed her discomfort with her role in the extended family:

I: When you first came back, once you felt emotionally better, in terms of your personal life, did you then sort of any cultural adjustment to being back? Are there any ways in which you discover you are more Australian then you thought or there are certain Australian behaviors that you either have to change or didn't want to change?

P: Not interference, but sometime I thought there's an infringement on my freedom and individuality, when I was back to Hong Kong, just like my in-laws' family, as they are quite wealthy in a way, so they take good care of the kids, they buy them flats, say, for example, my in-law even cook the breakfast and put it in front of our flat so that my husband could have breakfasts. She has a good intention, but at that time, I thought "What is that mean? Does it mean that I won't cook breakfast for him?!" But she takes care of everything, trying to be helpful. She has a good intention, but in a way... I still, but you don't go back there for dinner, or even during the weekends, usually they have gatherings together. Sometimes I strike over that and not happy about that and say, "I just don't want to be together all the time." But the Chinese culture, the family want to be together, the togetherness sometimes suffocate me. But with age, nowadays, I don't quite mind. I find the way in between. And also, when I grow older, especially with kids, sometimes I become more mature and I try to appreciate their helpfulness. They help a lot. So I come to see that it's not so black and white. But in reality, individualism and collectivism sometimes you have to make a balance.

I: So you have found that how you felt initially, which was suffocating a little bit, and you said infringement, that over the years, since then, after



you have back for 10 years, you feel more comfortable (P: Yes.) of the Chinese culture of being with the family a lot.

P: Not a lot because I guess I can strike the balance between the two. I still maintain my individuality, I guess they come to know me. In the past, they would say, when I have a kid, my daughter, they think if I don't go back for dinner during night time and I got out with my girl friends, they would have thought "Why?" But I guess I have my own way and I have domestic helpers to help me as well, so I don't care much about what they say but they don't say much nowadays. But in the beginning, they might. So I am still myself, I have my own way.

Another example of the struggle between Western and Chinese notions of family expectations is the comment by a female respondent who returned from Canada after five years with her two daughters. She describes the relationship between her children and their "very Chinese" grandparents:

P: I think that the immediate family is very close, but the extended family is not. Simply because we have much time to spend together. My daughters actually don't have very good relationship with their grandmother on my husband side mainly because she is very, very traditional Chinese. And my daughters are very westernized. When in fact most of my husband's family are all very traditional Chinese. Very very Chinese...

She describes the Chinese grandparents in the following way:

P: They were more conservative... (I: about moral standards?) Not very accepting of things that are different. When my daughters have family gatherings when they are back, unfortunately they feel very uncomfortable with that... they (the children) feel they are like outsiders.

A female respondent who returned from Australia after 4½ years describes her guilt over the lack of time to spend with her parents now that she is back in Hong Kong:

P: When I return back to Hong Kong, I would try to, even though time wise I cannot do so, but when I cannot do so, I feel guilty. I try to have more time with them. But in Hong Kong you don't have a lot of places to go. People only go out for dinner. There's not much country side for you to go to. But right now, if I have time in a year, I usually would go one or two trips with my parents, long or short. But in Australia, it's easy. Friday night, drive the car, and go to some suburb and stay there for one or two days, have some resort somewhere. So I often

go out with my parents when I was in Australia. That kind of tradition, you can say that, when come back and I don't have time, I feel guilty.

Another female who left Hong Kong at age 18 for Canada describes her struggle between asserting her independence and pleasing her parents:

P: It's like an internal struggle, because at that time I kind of had an arrangement that I would like to get married with my French Canadian boyfriend and his whole family they met me in Quebec, in Montreal, in Toronto, and I knew all his family, his parents, brothers sisters; everybody they all accept me and love me a lot, but then my mother, my mother side, she could not accept anything, I even suggest that oh mom let's come out with my boyfriend for lunch or for dinner. My mom reject, so I try so many different things for them to get together but my mother she just couldn't accept any of the suggestions...

Because of mother's refusal to accept her relationship she eventually ended it.

One woman who immigrated to Canada when she was 14 and returned to Hong Kong 10 years later, is now married. She is having some difficulty interacting with her husband's traditional family.

P: I am more willing to voice out my feeling and then his family members describe me as a Western girl, like that's what they say. I just don't know Chinese culture as much. His mother would worship pray to the ancestor and light up incense. Things I don't know. And I tell her, you have to tell me what I should do, I don't know.

For other returnees, happy emotions were revealed in both the rekindling relationships with family members and old friends. One male who immigrated to Canada at age 31, remarked:

P: Returning, it was good. Because first most of my brothers, sister already move to Canada, so my parent very lonely. So when they came, then I return so I fill the gap. It's good for my mother, now, my father die 94, my mother was alone. So I am with her for 10 years, so I am very happy now because I am in Hong Kong.

## Parent-Child Interactions

A second critical traditional relationship is between the parent and child. Historically, Chinese parents received utmost respect from their children following the precepts of filial



piety. Parents also had near-complete authority over decision-making, whether selecting a mate or a career. Again, British influence and modernity have modified these behaviors but Hong Kong parents still have more control over their children than do Western parents. Parental guidance and control was not generally interpreted as putative by children, however. A 1983 Family Planning Association survey [described in Chan and Lee (1995)] reported that 41% of Hong Kong youth had very good or good relations with their fathers, 58% had similar relations with their mothers and 43% thought that their families were “sweet and warm.”

Many Hong Kong emigrants to Canada and Australia found cultural behavior and value modifications included substantial changes in parenting patterns. Return migration highlighted these shifts and in some instances they caused distress. Interestingly, while returnees reverted to more Hong Kong-style husband–wife role relations and more time-honored relations with their elderly parents, they resisted the return to traditional parenting styles, choosing to maintain Western relationships with their children. One factor, no doubt, that influenced their decision was the extent to which the children themselves had embraced the roles and independent behaviors of Western adolescents.

The same female returnee from Canada described above commented on the changes in her relationship with her children as a result of her sojourn:

P: We are definitely more open minded and westernized. Both my daughters have American boyfriends, and endless people have asked me that: Don't you mind? And I was thinking: my daughters don't see the colors in people, they just see “Joe” or “Bill” or whoever. And I feel the same way. But I know a lot of people don't. And I let them take more responsibilities for their lives. My daughters are very well traveled any way. And they have lived, expose to a lot of things. I think they probably... we let them make a lot of decisions.

She also describes her attitude towards her children's career choices:

P: When my daughters went to college, we told them that they have to find their own passion because if you don't, you will be like boring. And they did. In their second year of college, they found

what they wanted to do and they went for it. I never told them: I want you to major this or that, it was for them. But having said that, I have exposed them to a lot of different things. At the very young age, they volunteered in different organization, they done the normal things that a lot of kids do. Activities or so. I guess they were exposed to enough that it was quite obvious what they really liked. And it was just natural for them to go from there.

Another female interviewee left Hong Kong for Australia and returned after six years:

I: So your husband is involved in raising the children?

P: Yeah, we have lots of discussion with the kids, of what they wanted, try to talk to them. You know, not like the ordinary way, the traditional Chinese, “you got to do this or that,” you know.

I: So for instance, when it comes to the children thinking about their careers, would you say I like you to do this, like become a doctor?

P: No, you should tell them whatever you like, as long as you think it makes you happy. It can be a chef, even a chef or whatever you like. It's quite open. And my daughter she is talking about her boyfriend with me, she's only 14 anyway, I am just scared when she talks about it. She talk about her boyfriends. And my younger son he's nine years old, he talk about his girlfriend. (I: they start very young) Yeah. It's quite open actually.

She also describes her non-migrating Hong Kong friends' astonishment at the open relationship she has with her teenage daughter:

P: I think we are more western because of my experience, a bit open. Like for example, I can see one things is there is an occasion we have BBQ party at home, and my daughter ask me ‘if it's possible to bring my friends’ that means her boyfriend home? That's her boyfriends. That's fine, bring him home, I want to talk to him as well. And then at that moment we have other family as well, the relatives, this and that. I can tell when they see that I allow my daughter to bring her boyfriend home, they are a bit astonished. But they can't say out. To me, I think it's okay, actually I want to talk to him to see how he's like. Seems like they're astonished how come you are so open and let her bring the boyfriend home.

A third female interviewee immigrated to Canada at age 33 and returned after four years. She reminisces about the activities she was able to engage in with her daughter while in Canada:

P: I am quite sorry about that, because I didn't have enough time spending with her. If we were in Canada, we might have some time to spend with other families, we go outing, we go to other places,

we let her run around, things like that. But we just don't have enough time. Talking about the Easter holiday, I enjoyed very much because I have some time spending with her. Not much during other days.

She goes on to describe how she tries as much as possible to recreate that atmosphere now that she is back in Hong Kong, allowing her daughter to go the parks and playgrounds. She also expressed regret over the fact that she and her husband no longer have as much time to spend with their child as they did while in Canada:

I: But how about your husband spending time with your daughter and with you. Has that changed?

P: Yes, both of us are too busy, so... yeah, that's a big change. My daughter has to spend time with her grandmother all by herself.

I: Do you ever feel that you don't want to work so hard?

P: Definitely. That's what I look for.

A male respondent who returned from Australia after two years describes how he now believes that he should respect his children and allow them to make their own decisions:

P: We just give them advice. When they grow up, just like Hong Kong Chinese just try to control everything of their children. But we learn from Australia that we should respect our children. But we can guide them, just as you said.

This male respondent returned to Hong Kong after four years in Canada. He describes his experience parenting his "Canadian" son:

P: In terms of family, I think is quite different especially in terms of parenting. In fact very different, because my son went to Canada when he was 3, when we went back he was 10, so basically he has received 7 years of Canadian education. So I guess deep in his heart, he is more a Canadian than a Chinese. And obviously he would not accept the Chinese way of parenting which I was brought up. Unfortunately, initially, I was still trying to institute those kind of Chinese teaching, thinking, Chinese moral standard to him. (I: even in Canada or when you got back?) in Canada and when I got back, both. But I guess it is more so when I got back here. But unfortunately it didn't work out, so actually I have one point in kind, I have quite sore relationship with my son, because of this conflicting. So I guess in the past 2 years I decide I got a Canadian son, I had to do the Canadian way. (I: so what is the Canadian, way, how was that?) basically you treat the children as equal, rather than like the traditional Chinese way of father son relationship.

Another male who returned from Australia after three years also described changes in his relationship with his children:

P: I became more appreciative of the importance of having their... individualism. They have their own strength. They have their own style and future. So it become more important not to just train them to have technical skills, but to develop them in a all round manner, to let them think and be more creative and have more exposure so that they can find their way.

## Adolescent Adjustment

Traditional Chinese family structure maintains a prolonged adolescent period in which the parent continues to serve as guide, coach, and mentor to their teenaged child who, in turn, accepts and respects the wishes of their parents. The outcome of this system of parental control and adolescent acquiescence is a tight-forming relational network where success is paramount. It is important to note that the concept of *guan* (or training) includes not only control but also parental concern, physical proximity, and caring (Chao 1994). Indebtedness to parents, developing throughout a normal childhood, increased when parents immigrated for the sake of their children's security and schooling.

Although the majority of the participants in the Hong Kong Remigration Project immigrated due to anxiety about the Handover, parents were also concerned about their children's wellbeing. One man who immigrated Canada at age 16 commented:

P: I think at the time they (his parents) believe that we would have a very bright future if we actually move away from Hong Kong, because they probably see the education system in Hong Kong doesn't fit us, and also the environment and all these surrounding might not be a good environment for a small child like us to live, the quality of living.

In a small qualitative study of Hong Kong immigrant adolescents in Canada, Lam (2001) found that the sense of *bao* (reciprocity) increased among the Hong Kong adolescents as they tried to repay their indebtedness to their parents. A participant in the HKRP who received his university education in Canada tried to reciprocate by returning to Hong Kong to work.

P: ...I have another big decision. Whether I want to work in Canada or Hong Kong. And that decision I have, actually my parent kind of helped me, I was thinking about going to Hong Kong for the reason that now I finish my degree, basically finished my mission to Canada. And my parents in Hong Kong, I want to spend more time with my parent, my mom and dad in Hong Kong.

Other remigrants who spent their adolescence in Canada or Australia, found that they had adapted to the more independent mode of thinking, without their parents' guidance or by minimizing parental control or input. In describing whether his relationship with his family was Chinese or Canadian, one remigrant commented:

P: Half and half. I give them respect, like the Chinese way, but when it's time to make decision, it's falling into my personal choices and space and kind of making sacrifices. If I could see it as justifiable (a parent's point of view), I will give in. But if it's just for the sake of – things are the way it is...no sorry.

A woman who immigrated when she was 14 said:

P: I think I behave most, like most teenagers, rebellion, just don't want to follow the rules, but I do seek their advice, like even I apply university, even though they don't really, they couldn't really give me a lot of advice. I still keep them up to date, I have then consent about what faculty I want to go into, what university I want to choose. I guess that's considered to be very Chinese...We have a big fight over choosing Simon Fraser University over University of British Columbia (UBC)... So we have a big fight. But I finally I got to choose what I want.

Adolescent cultural adaptation included engaging in Canadian or Australian activities which were normative for teens in those countries but contrary to Hong Kong adolescent behavior.

P: I started drinking at Starbucks. I got a part-time job. I volunteered even more when I got into university. At the beginning I help in the Chinese committee, and later on I volunteer at the volunteer centre.... For my parents, for my dad, for my mom, volunteer is a waste of time. They think is, you just study more.

Back in my high school I always skip my classes, you know, sneak out at night. I don't think you could easily do that in Hong Kong, you live in a small apartment you probably can't sneak out at night.

However, adjusting one's behavior to conform to adolescent norms while living in the West, could have negative consequences upon remigration. One woman who immigrated to Canada when she was 14 and returned to Hong Kong in her 20s shared this anecdote.

P: The way how I hang out with guys...I didn't know that until there is one word that comes from a guy. One day he told me ... "Do you know the way you treat guys here bring the wrong message?" "Well, what do I do? I think I am pretty conservative person." He said, "You would touch a guy, you would not hug but pat a guy easily." I didn't know that I would be giving out a wrong message. I would initiate calling a guy and ask him to hang out. I never knew that would be the wrong message here... that would be a more Canadian thing. I am just acting out friendly gesture so I guess is just like Italian touch women's bust, for Italian it's just nothing strange. But for other people in the world it's probably a substance of offence. I didn't know. Sometimes I have to remind myself the way you treat local guys.

## School Decisions

Hongkongers have a variety of schooling options for their children: private or public, religious or secular, international or country-specific. While many returnees chose to return to Hong Kong in part to ensure that their children would maintain Cantonese linguistic fluency, they also wanted them to preserve their English skills and learn Mandarin. Parents strategically planned to raise global children. To accomplish these tasks, the majority of parents chose international schools (such as the English Schools Foundation or the Chinese International School) or Western-curriculum-based schools that were oriented to one specific country (e.g., the Canadian School, the Australian school, and the Hong-Kong International School which followed an American curriculum). Linguistic competence was not the only rationale for parents' educational choices. Following years of living in the West, Hong Kong parents enthusiastically accepted a model of education that highlighted Western values. Most prominent were pedagogical techniques reinforcing independence of action, critical thinking, challenging authority

(teacher), and self-reliance. Rote memorization, exam-based curriculum, reserved students, and obedience to teachers were nearly absent in the Canadian and Australian classrooms.

The decision regarding choice of school is explained by this female respondent who returned from Australia after five years:

P: Because in the long run, we do think that we would move back to Australia, so I want her English to be polished, and also because I don't quite like the Hong Kong education system.

I: What is that you don't like and what is that you like about EFS system.

P: The system now is even worse than when I was in before. Even like the product, the education system here, university students, like in this university, I didn't think that they are quite up to par but of course there's related to... in the past Hong Kong, there are only two universities, so it's quite a elite system, but now... (I: Democratization of education, meaning more people in the past wouldn't have gone to university are going now.) That's true. But it's just that I think the government and the education department now changes their policies too often. I guess the teachers, and also it's too exam-oriented, I don't quite like that. Because a lot of kids lose their motivation to study and in my opinion, I think that if you don't kill their motivation, then they might believe that they are able to learn in the long way as much as possible. I think that's very important and as far as I can see, a lot of the students in the local education system in the local school, they don't like study at all, they hate going to school and I don't want my kid to hate going to school. And they don't like reading books, so I think that really horrible.

A male interviewee returned from Australia after 2½ years and explained his decision to send his daughter to an international school in the following way:

P: Yes. That's why I put my daughter into an international school. I think of course I prefer my daughter, if possible, she can study in Hong Kong. I also have planned, may be she need to have her education in Australia as well. So that's why I have planned my daughter's education development. I put her in an international school in Hong Kong, hope if she could get into a university in Hong Kong, ok, fine. If she cannot get into a university in Hong Kong, she also has the opportunity to study in Australia.

One female respondent returned from Australia after two years and explained her struggle to

navigate between traditional Chinese behaviors and her Australian influences:

P: I think I try to learn, make myself to learn the meaning, the meanings of life, enjoy the process everyday. Not really aiming at the result. But it's of course its worry, my heart will be worry and trouble because oh, is that way can be okay, is that being irresponsible? Because what I am doing.

I: Am I being a good parent by doing this?

P: Yeah, all the way I bought up is different. Because every Hong Kong people bought up is like the same. Very objective oriented, and, so this sort of value will be like a change relationship. Carry for every generation, every generation, every generation...

I: But you made a decision for instance to send your children to a ESF school. Why did you do that?

P: I think I am a part of it from, westernize person. I tried every different way to, I really want to explore, is this okay? This way can be okay? This way better than this way or? I always want to try so my kids are my experiment.

A male respondent who returned from Australia after two years explained his decision to send his children to an international school:

P: I have a good relationship with my parents. And also my wife's parents. But I realize that we have cultural gap with our children. (I: Could you describe that?) Probably, as I said, my heart is Chinese. Our activities, our behavior are not that Chinese. Like we don't give too much constraint to our kids. We let them do what they want unless they cross the boundary. So this is the way we grow our kids.

I: So you think that is some more western style?

P: Yes. And my kids are attending international schools. It's not because they couldn't take the local school, but we don't like putting exams and marks as a priority. Most local schools work very hard.

I: So you didn't want just an exam as the reflection of education.

P: Exactly.

He describes what he sees as the difference between traditional Chinese education and that offered by the international school in the following excerpt:

I: And what is it about the education styles of those schools that you like? Why was it appealing to you?

P: That kind of schools, actually, they learn lots of general knowledge. And different kind of thinking. (I: Can you describe that, different kind of thinking?)

I think that is reflected from my children doing class projects. They read a lot of materials, they search facts and figures from different source. After that, presenting the report is also very fun.

Another example is a male who returned from Canada with his wife and son after three years. He explains his decision to send his son to an international school in the following way:

P: To minimize the impact to them as much as possible. That's why I would try to put them in Canadian school. Actually is my son, because my daughter wasn't reach the school age yet, when she came back, she was 3, when we came back she also 3, wasn't at school then, so she's not a big problem. But nevertheless I still out her in international school, but for the son, because he was at grade 5 or grade 6 the time when we came back, he's a bit worry of the Chinese, he cannot read any Chinese at all. So to me, if I have to put him in a local school, it's almost impossible task. So basically I have no choice but to put him in a Canadian school. And also as I said, my original intention is that I only come back 2 years to stay for a few years, 5, 6 years, that was my think at that time, so he needs to go back anyway. So I would try to minimize any destruction to his school. So that's the reason I out him in international school.

A male respondent who returned to Hong Kong with his wife and kids describes the difference between the Canadian and Hong Kong education system:

P: I want them to know the outside world, first things is. Second things is to me Canadian education is more creative. Hong Kong education is very, you know, that's reading, reading, reading. I can tell my daughter's quite creative, my son is, like me, very stubborn, not too creative. So I want them to look at particular system. And to me Canada is a good place for study. I know, good quality of teacher, people friendly, a lot of space, more practical learning, rather than Hong Kong just textbook, textbook, textbook.

## Residential Decisions: Flats and Neighborhoods

Returned migrants faced other major decisions, this one affecting the entire family: where to live? Hong Kong is composed of geographic areas, some distinctively different—Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, New Territories, Lan Tau Island, some

more subtly dissimilar—Wan Chai or Happy Valley. One constant was the high price of real estate. Hongkongers who emigrated in the early 1990s left a depressed housing market and those who sold in Canada or Australia in the late 1990s and early 2000s likewise found real estate prices low, and a rebounded housing market in Hong Kong.

For some returnees, there was no choice despite their preference to live somewhere else. These were the families who maintained an apartment in Hong Kong when they emigrated. In their absence, a relative or friend may have been living there. In rare cases, the apartment was vacant and used by the family during holidays and vacations back in Hong Kong. Some remigrants, while no longer home owners, felt compelled to choose a flat located near an elderly parent. But these were in a minority. The majority of the returnees viewed the housing choice with one clear objective: where can I duplicate the living experience I enjoyed in Sydney or Toronto? This translated into flats with larger rooms, a quiet neighborhood and access to green space, parks, and outside leisure activities. For some, this also meant a neighborhood with an international presence, either by virtue of the residents or the shops and services.

Returning from Canada after 8½ years, a female interviewee described her choice of neighborhood in the following excerpt:

I: So is your apartment, is it very international or is it primarily Chinese who lived there?

P: Right now, as I moved back to Happy Valley. We used to live in that building before and my husband like the place, quiet and the view is good. So we brought a house in Happy Valley. The same house before we moved. But it was higher in the 30th floor.

I: So you lived in the mid-levels initially, was that an international environment?

P: Yes, there are a lot of English people. It's very convenient because of the walk. The escalator. That's why.

I: But then you moved to Happy Valley because it was more green?

P: Not too crowded. More space in that area.

I: How about that? Is it also sort of an international neighborhood?

P: Yes, there are a lot of international people. But most of them are rented out. Some of them are rented out to the overseas people.



This female respondent immigrated to Canada at age 36 and returned with her husband and children:

P: The big difference is, while we are in Canada, we have a peaceful time. More spacious, even though in the house. In Hong Kong, we have less space, even the kids. Sometimes they already adopt the habit to eat in front of the TV. But in Canada, we usually eat in the kitchen, and we don't have a TV in the kitchen. So it's good, we talk. And now I would say, 'I would stop the TV because we have no time over the dinner time we can talk about what's happening in school and in Canada we drive them and pick them from school ourselves. So there's a lot of time that we are together. But it seems that back to Hong Kong everyone is much more busier. But not because of their homework, they have their own corners, they play on their games, they are attracted by the TV...it's not so peaceful as before. I really feel more stressful. Even though I am not working now, but I find that once I go out on the street, I take the transport and I give into the MTR, I want to get something from the shop... all are stressful. Much more stressful than in Canada. It's much more peaceful there. You can have space, not like in Hong Kong. That's why our whole family is still looking forward to go back.

She also explained her family's decision to move to Hong Kong Island. The neighborhood was quite international and she claimed:

P: We found that it's quite easy for us to adapt to that. Before we moved in, we don't know there are so much expatriates, or I think there is quite a lot of families like us. I know a Taiwan family, one other family who has kids in the same school with my daughter.

A male respondent who returned to Hong Kong after four years with his wife and kids explained their choice of neighborhood in the following way:

P: But in Hong Kong there are some other place, like the Peak, midlevel, and then Yau Yat Chuen area, Kowloon Tong, quite nice. Where the sort of overseas type of environment.

I: So you decide to live in a place that wasn't so crowded?

P: That's right. (I: so that's why you move to Kowloon Tong?) yes, select the Yau Yat Chuen, so you can drive your car, to the car park and then go up stairs. It's all undercover, very Canadian style.

Another example is this female respondent who returned from Australia after 2½ years:

I: What about your decision of where to live when you get back to Hong Kong? Where did you go?

Did you say that you wanted to be with your family in a very Hong Kong neighborhood, or an international neighborhood, or...

P: Well, I didn't decide whether... because it is hard to pinpoint somewhere to live. The point is, we want to find a place not too crowded. Because we are used to the Australian way, not too crowded, so we want to get somewhere not too crowded. So we picked Ma On Shan, because that place is a newly developed suburb, not so crowded, not too many buildings, something like that. And there is a nice beach over there, and a park over there and it seems like I am in Australia.

I: Are there many of your neighbors who've lived in other countries?

P: Yes. Some Japanese, Koreans, and even some western, I think they are expatriates

I: And even some Chinese who came back from other countries like you?

P: Uh, yes.

## Balancing Family and Work

For some repatriates, behavior and attitudes remained more Hong Kong than Western, not surprising given the flexible nature of the Hong Kong culture. One example is the area of work-life balance—the balance of time between work commitment and family life. Due to the traditional Confucian tradition of hard work, Hongkongers tend to work long hours, often six days a week, dramatically tipping the scales to the work side. Once they immigrated, many appreciated the opportunity to spend more time with their families. They often traveled with their children, went hiking and biking and enjoyed the natural beauty of Canada or Australia. They shifted the balance toward “family life” while living in their settlement countries. The scales tipped back, however, when they re-migrated. Interviewees commented that hard work and long hours is “the right way” to approach work. Despite many years of living in the West, these remigrants, sometimes regrettably, resumed this life-style upon their return to Hong Kong. This is illustrated quite clearly in a comment from a male repatriate who returned from Canada after more than six years:

P: And for myself I spend more time at work. So a lot of time I don't finish at 8 or 9 in evening. And sometimes I work like, most of the time I work in weekend as well. So we see each other less than



before. And a lot of time she really have a impact on me, because sometimes my wife come to and say "do you have time to talk to me?" and that really impact me a lot. I must be leaving my family behind for quite a long time. Although we see each other every evening, we sleep in the same bed every evening, but it seems that we don't have kind of intimate or close dialogues as often as we would have in Canada.

A similar comment is made by a male repatriate who moved back to Hong Kong after a few years in Australia:

P: Before we have children, my wife also worked. We are just busy with our own work. We seldom talked to each other in Hong Kong. In Australia, no such problem because you always have a long weekend day and my wife was not working, she was studying there, and you still have a lot of leisure time. When we came back in Hong Kong, the working time is so long and my wife always need to work until 8 or 9. Sometimes it's over night, just before the publish of annual report.

I: So is it frustrating after you lived in Australia and you know that one can have a life which has more leisure?

P: We don't think so because you can't compare. The salary you get here, and what you got in Australia, is quite a big difference. When you get more, you have to pay more, in terms of your effort and time.

I: So the salary compensates for having less time together and people all feel comfortable with the trade off having more money but less time.

P: Because we need to get the saving and in the future we can retire earlier.

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## Reforming the Family During Re-migration

The experience of migration transformed the most central values in the minds and lives of the Hongkongers. Core Chinese values of filial piety and obedience to parents, interdependence on the family, focus on the material, and learning through repetition receded in prominence and were replaced by Western values of independence of thought, freedom of action, individuality, focus on nature and leisure, and creativity. A select few traditional values survived although in modified form: flexibility of thought and behavior, long-term strategic planning for the family, and an emphasis on hard work.

Families changed most radically in the ways in which parents interacted with their juvenile and adolescent children. A hierarchical structure was replaced by a more egalitarian one whereby children were given more independence of thought and action. With minimal parental guidance, children could select playmates, food, career goals, and romantic partners. A strategic outlook was taken with a view toward the future by attempting to raise trilingual, bicultural children. This was accomplished through several tactical decisions. Western-style neighborhoods and homes were chosen in which free play and open spaces could mimic their residences abroad and outdoor leisure activities could be easily pursued. Schools were selected where English language skills would be reinforced and critical thinking pedagogy and active student involvement in learning would predominate. Periodic trips were made to the settlement country to maintain friendship and linguistic ties.

Young adults, raised in Canada or Australia, found that their now customary way of interacting freely with opposite-sex friends and their easy-going interactions with bosses had to be modified somewhat now that they had returned to Hong Kong. Their actions were often mis-interpreted as inappropriate. Some of these remigrants who were in their 20s now, chose to work for international companies or befriended other returnees.

More traditional aspects of family life were maintained most assiduously with elderly parents and in-laws. Although few remigrants returned fully to their pre-migration family behaviors, they participated in family events, visited their elderly relatives, and listened to parental advice. Some moved close to their families. With some regret, many remigrants returned to more traditional relationships with their spouses, spending less time together, working longer hours and more days each week. By necessity, this meant less time together and with the children. Social and psychological dislocation of immigration and remigration has continued and perhaps hastened a familial trend observed in the 1970s by researchers Chaney and Podmore (1974). They comment:

With regard to relationships between husband and wife, and parents and children, the normative views

of the respondents are more consonant with the conjugal (nuclear) family than the traditional Chinese family. Where relationships with the older generation are concerned, a pattern quite consonant with traditional norms is revealed. (p. 404)

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# Social Networks and Family Relations in Return Migration

# 5

Janet W. Salaff and Arent Greve

The family is central to migration. Once overlooked as peripheral by researchers who believe that people calculate their migration decisions based on economic costs and rewards, family and social relations now take a central role in analyses (Massey et al. 1987; Boyd 1989). Models of migration have shifted from focusing on the individual to a network of social relations. Social science studies of transnational migration confirm the importance of family links to migration (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Levitt 2002; Palloni et al. 2001; Smith 2002). However, while migration studies now include a focus on family, this aspect is neglected in studies of return migration. Scholars of return migration tend to highlight Asian job opportunities, stressing how these underpin the return of individuals who initially left the region (Zweig et al. 2006). To address this gap in research, our investigation of Asian family migration focuses on return migration, studying how youths, who have personal relations with their homeland, decide whether to return. Our research team has conducted a number of studies on Chinese family migration and return migration (Salaff et al. 2008, 2010). This chapter discusses how Asian youths make decisions about where

to live after graduation considering family and social relations.<sup>1</sup>

Asian return migration is a major issue in Canada, which received around 40,000 immigrants from Hong Kong annually from 1990 to 1996. Approximately 55% of these immigrants left Canada within 10 years after arriving, apparently returning to Asia (Aydemir and Robinson 2008). Australia recorded even higher return rates (Mak 1997; Pe-pua et al. 1996). Since 1996, Canada receives annually around 40,000 immigrants from the PRC. The PRC currently welcomes and rewards highly educated emigrants who return to China (Zweig et al. 2004, 2006); whether or not these policies substantially affect return rates remains to be seen.

The upsurge in immigration from Hong Kong and the PRC to Canada in the 1990s brought many families with young children to the country. These children have now finished university and are deciding whether to return home or stay in Canada. We study youths in families that are separated from their Asian roots through migration. Our subjects have family origins in Hong Kong, the PRC, and other Asian countries and are in the process of graduating and entering the labour force. We interviewed them in Toronto where

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<sup>1</sup>Our future studies focus on those subjects that actually re-migrated. Some issues remain to be investigated, including whether the networks, personal relations, and job training mesh when these youths do return, and how they weave their attachment to two homes, Canada and Asia, in their daily lives.

they attended university. We use qualitative methods to investigate respondents' biographies and thereby distinguish family factors that lead some, but not others, to return. Because the subjects are at a transition point where they can choose to return home or stay abroad, we explore their preferred locales after graduation.

This chapter discusses how family relations affect the return migration of these youth, but our previous papers have described other institutional, national, and global factors that affect their migration projects (Salaff et al. 2008). In the following sections we discuss how social relations affect migration, and then we turn to our methods and present our results.

## Social Structures and Identities

Two main bodies of literature deal with international return migrants: identities and social networks. These are related issues, yet are often discussed separately (Cassarino 2004). Howard (2000, p. 367) argued that identity and structures should be unified in a "politicised social psychology of identities that brings together the structures of everyday lives and the socio-cultural realities in which those lives are lived". We examine the role of the family in bringing these together.

People are embedded in social structures with rules prescribing appropriate behaviour (March 1994). When immigrants settle in a new country, they become incorporated into the surrounding structures. Interactions with meaningful others in these structures teach them the social rules of their new environment and how they ought to act (Bauder 2005). Youth, who are still developing their identities, especially depend on these surrounding socialising structures. They participate in different types of interactions with others that span diverse social realms (Fouron and Glick-Schiller 2002). Relationships with parents and kin tend to be most important, followed by peer networks from school, the local neighbourhood, and, in some cases, church (Cuba and Hummon 1993).

These significant relationships may or may not include individuals closely tied to the country

of origin, and the national origins and cultural climate of classmates and friends all affect the identities of immigrant youths. Indeed, the numbers of co-ethnics in their circles and the nature of choices are crucial in forging the ethnic identities of these young people.

Not all emigrant youths identify with their homeland culture or want to maintain their native identities by uprooting themselves from their new home and returning to their old home. Some choose to return to their country of origin, while others hesitate or refuse to return, depending on the social structures in which they are embedded. They base their return migration decisions on what is appropriate within the context of their social structures. Those with structures linking back to their home of origin are most likely to feel and act on their native identity by entertaining return.

Relationships are not homogeneous; they include interactions with various individuals who have different expectations and to whom they may owe certain obligations. These differing expectations shape an immigrant's identity, which can result in demands that are often divisive, referred to as "role conflict", which must be resolved. These connections greatly influence the desire to return; therefore, it is important to explore how families build networks that affect youths' identification either with their native homeland or adopted home.

## Immigrant Generations

Life cycle factors are key migration turning points (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Mak 2006). These distinctions have been formalised in the literature. We refer to immigrant parents who settle with their families as "first generation" immigrants. The children they bring with them, who grew up both in their country of origin as well as abroad, are referred to as "1.5 generation" immigrants. We classify these 1.5 generation youths into two groups: those who emigrate before the age of 13 and older youths. Second generation immigrants are born in Canada. Age at immigration affects settlement in many ways.

These generations form structures and identities. To feel at home, people require language fluency and familiarity with cultural idioms: a cultural tool kit (Swidler 1986). A youth's age during family resettlement affects this tool kit. Youth peer groups are central in their identification.

Adult immigrants tend to follow their own contacts that they forged in the home country to places abroad. In contrast, young children, who leave their native land with their parents, play a minimal role in migration decisions and follow no networks of their own (Shik 2003). Those who emigrate at an early age lose school friendships; their dependency on their parents' networks is complete. Yet they may articulate views of where they feel home (Orellana et al. 2001).

Younger immigrants spend a longer period in schools and with friends in the host country, allowing them to be both local and non-local simultaneously. Fluency in the language of a native country, including use of language in socially appropriate ways, is crucial to interactions with individuals from the country of origin. Danico (2004) argues that youths, who arrive in a new country before age 13, are able to learn the new language of the host country without an accent, while maintaining their facility in their mother tongue. Adolescents who immigrate at older ages usually speak with an accent and are thus less likely to be considered "local" by their peers. This allows immigrant parents to include children in their native social and cultural events, socialising the youngsters into their mother culture (Danico 2004). If children learn the language fluently, they can converse meaningfully with others when they return to their homeland (Menjivar 2002).

However, those that arrive at a young age not only lose their facility with the native language, local peer groups are more likely to accept them. They have less contact with the cultural tool kit of their place of origin than with that of the host society.

The 1.5 generation youth, who followed their parents' initial exit from their homeland as youngsters, have the best chance to interact with both cultures. They are embedded in two societies and can develop feelings of belonging to both.

The older they were when they emigrated, the more likely they are to have the cultural tool kit that allows them to envision living in their original homeland.

In contrast, second generation immigrants are removed from their roots. They do not know their homeland well, possibly having only heard about Asia remotely (Adefuin 2002). They may visit rarely because their parents' lives are in the new country. Those born in the host country are less likely to be embedded in Asian society, and thus to consider Asia one of their homes. Their homeland is not their home, yet locals may still discriminate against them (Danico 2004).

It is a challenge for immigrant parents to influence their children's peers. The social network contacts of the various immigrant generations greatly affect the likelihood of their return to their country of origin. In particular, because children represent the future of the family, and parents sacrifice a lot to send them abroad, parents and children have a very strong interdependency. Parents hope to play an important role in their children's future, and youth may not find it easy to make their own choices about where to live.

This interdependence may exist in many immigrant families, but it is especially prevalent in Chinese families. Middle-class parents take over many aspects of their children's future decisions. Mothers go out of the way to steer the children's life course (Lam 2007). Children are brought up to comply with their parents' plans for them. These cultural factors cement further the power of social relations over emigrant youths: returning cannot be considered outside the framework of normative expectations.

We hypothesise that more social links and cultural capital connecting host and origin countries will increase the chances of a youth being interested in moving back to the home country; connections forged over years of family relationships and personal interactions with individuals from their homeland should tend to encourage youth to see return as an option. The next section discusses the factors that influence our subjects' wishes to return or stay in the host country.



## Family Variables: Family Migration History and Social Networks

Migration is not a once-and-for-all activity that severs migrants' relationship with their home country. Migrants maintain social relationships over time and space, and these can lead them back to their native land. This section discusses how youths' family migration history shapes their contact with their homeland.

Family relations and social networks motivate young people to return to their country of origin. The nature of their own and their parents' contacts with their homeland affect youths' decisions to return. Differing generations of immigrants maintain differing ties to kin and friends, and the location of their parents' social networks affects youths' decisions to stay or return to their country of origin.

Emigrants maintain a variety of contacts with their place of origin (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). The term "transnationalism" highlights migrants' maintenance of regular migration linkages between sending and receiving countries and the back-and-forth movement of people crossing borders (Cassarino 2004; Portes et al. 1999). However, not all transnational contacts affect youths' choices about return migration. This section focuses on transnational activities that build networks and create feelings of belonging. These require youth to share experiences with those on distant shores; denser contacts will affect youth more, generating the desire to return.

Immigrants' contact with their homeland and transnationalism varies greatly and takes many forms (Fong et al. 2007; Portes 2001). Advanced communications technology and convenient transportation allow migrants to maintain relationships across long distances. Local newspapers or television reports keep people abreast of culture in their home country. However, not all communications build enduring transnational relations. While electronic communications transmit news and cognitive contact and enable immigrants to imagine life at home, these interactions may not be enough to allow youths to build their own transnational social relations.

Some engage in more extensive transnational activities to fulfil their family needs. The densest forms of interaction include visiting several times a year. Women tend to maintain their kinship responsibilities, and are more likely to travel to see ill parents (Salaff 2002). Young mothers facing a shortage of child care in North America may send their small children home or bring parents over (Salaff and Greve 2004). Parents often send children back to learn the language in their early years.

The credentials of immigrant professionals are rarely recognised and they often fail to find suitable work in the host country (Li 2001; Reitz 2001; Salaff and Greve 2004). Others may not be successful with their new business. Hence, following their initial landing, many fathers who are unable to support the family economically, may return to jobs or family businesses in Asia, dividing their households into two locations and engaging in family transnationalism. The term "astronaut" was coined to describe the long-distance commuter, usually the husband, working in Hong Kong or China with his family living in the host country. The astronaut phenomenon refers to families dividing their household and kin networks into different locations, each fulfilling different functions. Taiwanese immigrants in Australia with businesses in Taiwan frequently return to Taiwan, maintaining contact with relatives and friends. They use newspapers and the Internet to keep up to date with news in Taiwan (Hsu and Ip 2006). This method of adapting to a hostile local labour market to meet the economic needs of the immigrant family was common in Canada among Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwanese, and PRC immigrants of the 1990s. As a result, having a home in both locations enables youths to visit or work in their home country as they got older, without needing to find a place to live. This dense form of transnationalism most likely leads to youth's ability to establish and maintain their own social networks and an Asian identity, which may lead to return migration.

For a variety of reasons, not all migration is intended as permanent. Middle-class families may create alternative homes in the West to give their children opportunities for a better education

and social environment (Waters 2005). Parents may bring their children back to Asia for education or send them to boarding school in the West while the parents live in Asia, resulting in frequent transnational visits by children. Parents may not expect their children to remain in the West, but the youth might opt to stay.

Family transnationalism figures in youths' decisions to remain or to return. Dense personal exchanges build and maintain migrants' networks that connect the host and home countries. These interactions incorporate youths into their parents' Asian networks, allowing youth to build their own networks that are linked to the family's. As they grow older, these migrant youths tend to forge their own transnational networks, creating feelings of familiarity and a sense of home. Such networks and the feelings of belonging strongly influence the youths to return to their homeland.

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### Family Life Cycle Variables

The importance of family in decision making is most evident where migration is linked to life cycle events. The choice of professions, the choice of mate, and taking on parental care responsibilities figure importantly for this age group. The decisions youth make differ somewhat by gender. For all, these are turning points that mark their life course (Mandelbaum 1973).

The choice of fields of study is not motivated solely out of interest for the subject area. Instead, it reflects gendered opportunities and expectations about appropriate fields of study and work, how far girls would be allowed to study, and other issues. For these overseas educated youth, career choice is further tied to their decision about where to locate, and so it was often a compromise between professional interest and place of practice.

Finding the right mate is not merely about attraction, but also entails decisions about where to live and raise a family and what kind of Asian-identified life they would lead. There is much debate over whether migration loosens or reinforces gendered marriage roles. Moving to a new

location may widen circles from which youth choose mates, but in Toronto today, the Asian community is both large and structured by ethnic background (Salaff and Chan 2007). Most choose mates with same ethnic background (Rodríguez-García 2007; Lee and Boyd 2008). Past that, seeking a partner who shares their life interests including their views of identity and home, youths are likely to choose one from the same sub-ethnic cohort. These considerations figure in the horizons of both men and women.

Taking responsibility for their parents' needs related to the life cycle is especially tied to gender. Family reunion is important to Chinese parents, and many give priority to living in the same city as their children. Children share their parents' wishes for a family-centred life; living near their kin is normative, a powerful force when it is congruent with their parents' wishes (Lam 2007). There is an associated responsibility for taking care of parents. When parents are well, living nearby is optional, and negotiated. But given the limited elder care facilities and strong pressures for familial care giving, when parents are unwell, living near them becomes a duty. Hong Kong Chinese males are increasingly likely to say they will care for their parents (Wong 2009), but women are more likely to take concrete steps to do so.

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### Our Sample

We explore the role of family in return migration among Asian youth by interviewing 27 Asian students in Toronto, Canada, in 2007 and 2008. These are ordinary young men and women who are about to decide where to live and work. We follow up with as many as possible as they make their first move. The subjects all have East Asian family backgrounds. Twenty-five are born abroad, coming from the following countries: PRC ( $N=13$ ); Hong Kong ( $N=12$ ); Korea ( $N=1$ ); and Singapore ( $N=1$ ). Four are born in Canada. Subjects include immigrants, sojourners, as well as global residents who spent years in various countries either as individuals or with their families.

## Respondents' Characteristics

We use snowball sampling to reach our subjects. Existing research participants refer potential subjects to the research team from their own social networks. As the sample grows enough data is gathered to be useful for research. This sampling technique is often used in "hidden" or hard to access populations; in this case it was hard for the research team to find students of East Asian background who were willing to share their views on family commitment, identity, and other topics. Our eventual sample comprises 21 subjects who had been Salaff's students (18 had taken an East Asian Studies Course under the University of Toronto Study Abroad Programme in Hong Kong). They also recruited their friends. Most participants have an arts and social sciences background; this field of study eases their fit into the East Asian labour force, enabling their return to Asia. Subjects also include business students ( $N=4$ ), law student ( $N=1$ ), and a science major ( $N=1$ ), but future research will need to include a wider sample of students with other majors. Five are studying for post-graduate degrees.

Of the 27 respondents, 15 arrived in Canada as young immigrants with their families; 11 of these before they had reached the age of 13. Another four are second generation, born in Canada to parents that had been born and raised in Asia and then immigrated to Canada. Finally, eight had entered Canada as international students. We interviewed 22 females and five males. Two are married, and the rest single, some in serious romantic partnerships.

Interviews are semi-structured and lasted two hours. We collected information about subjects' education, jobs, family history, language, peers and significant others, and national and place identity. We listened to their dreams, expectations, and disappointments related to staying in Canada or returning to Asia. Our discussion of the cultural and social issues that young migrants face within the family sphere help us identify how family relations enter into the decision-making process about staying or returning.

## Findings: Staying or Leaving?

Their age at initial migration is connected to their intended residence after graduation. Of the 27 youths, seven want to stay in Canada, ten want to return to Asia, and ten are unsure. Table 5.1 lists the distributions based on their immigrant generation classification. Of course, given their youth, many subjects are still in the exploratory stage of deciding on their careers, and choosing whether to go back to Asia or remain in Canada to work.

Of our subjects, the younger they were when they emigrated, the least likely they are to have the cultural tool kit that allow them to envision living in their original homeland. Thus, the second generation is not attracted to Asia. In contrast, those born in Asia are to the greatest extent embedded in Asian society, and thus most likely to consider Asia one of their homes. The 1.5 generation is more likely than the second generation to consider returning, but many of these are still unsure about what to do.

Our subjects also include visa students who had not immigrated. They might be expected to return to their sending country after graduation. However, Canada's need for skilled immigrants has eased the process of becoming landed to the extent that many are confronted with the choice to stay in Canada or return home after graduation.

Family transnational social networks are crucial in forging the ties that bind youths to their native place. Transnationalism is associated with generation of immigration (not shown here). The amount of their family contact with the homeland distinguishes those youth that want to return from those that want to stay.

Table 5.2 illustrates the relationship between transnationalism and interest in return migration.

**Table 5.1** Choice to return or stay

Immigrant status	Stay	Return	Unsure	Total
Second generation	3	1	–	4
1.5 generation	4	4	7	15
International student		5	3	8
Total	7	10	10	27

**Table 5.2** Network contacts and decision to return or stay in Canada

Contact	Return	Stay	Unsure	Total
No contact	0	7	1	8
Frequent contact	5	0	6	10
Total	5	7	7	19

If we remove the eight international students, the remaining subjects include 19 second or 1.5 generation youth. Of these, the parents of 11 subjects maintain dense transnational networks, which lead to the subjects' valuing their homeland to the extent of wanting to return. Table 5.2 shows that subjects with parents who maintain network contacts to their Asian homelands are most likely to entertain the idea of returning. They state either that they are sure to return or that they have mixed feelings and are uncertain.

In contrast, those without such contacts are unlikely to want to return. Individuals who remain in their adopted homes over long periods without visiting the home country tend to be better integrated into the host country, reversing any early intentions to return (Ganga 2006). Most of these subjects intend to stay in Canada after graduation.

## Other Family Variables

Both men and women express the sentiment of the importance of meeting family expectations so that the family can be together. Although there are few gender differences in expressed family values, when we look at actions taken, it seems that women are more likely to realise these values even if it is of real cost to them. Two examples are choosing career and partner.

While respondents of both sexes in our study voice the goal of family togetherness, the female respondents take steps to realise this goal even at some personal cost. The account of Venita, an international student in research psychology, shows that daughters do much to promote family unity. Her parents live in Hong Kong, and sent their three children abroad to study. The eldest son had already returned to Hong Kong and

married. Venita planned to join her younger brother studying at a university in London, where she had been accepted in the Master's programme. In the interim, she took a summer internship in research psychology in Hong Kong, but she was deeply disappointed in the limited scope of inquiry there. She became unsure about whether she should switch to an applied programme so that she could practice more easily in Hong Kong, even though it did not hold her interest. She eventually switched to an applied programme, expecting that it would mean a disappointing career, but as a dutiful daughter she plans to rejoin her family.

Other young women are flexibly modifying their goals to suit themselves as well as their families at the same time. In contrast, like Venita, several young men are deciding on specialist careers. These respondents are rarely ready to shed their original projects.

Male respondents who settled on a partner report that their partners would simply follow their choice of where to live. Female respondents, on the other hand, are more likely to express the view of "it depends" or "wait and see" when deciding where to live after marriage. Women expect to live where their husbands wish and it is gender appropriate to postpone making decisions. Gendered views of family responsibilities shape the intent of youths to return to Asia.

## Three Types

Using the experiences of several "stayers", "leavers", and those who are still uncertain, we see how the motives to return are rooted in diverse family biographies and dynamics.

### Stayers

The seven youths who are certain that they will remain in Canada after graduation are either born and raised in Canada with their parents, or they left their home country as children with their families, and their parents have not returned. Therefore, these youths are not pulled by their

parents' presence there, nor had they opportunity to build their own networks in their home country.

National political barriers hamper the return of former PRC migrant Don, encumbered by family politics. Don's father had held an official position and was able to leave Shanghai to work in the United States at a time when his government viewed emigrants as unpatriotic (Xiang 2003; Zhang 2003). Father remained abroad, joined by his wife and son. The family returned only once, after perceptions of emigrants had shifted. Throughout, the parents maintained sparse contact with their kin in China, but phone calls and letters did not allow Don, who left as a youngster, to build his own networks abroad. Don lacks the dense personal ties that allow him to see himself as having an everyday life in Shanghai. Feuding over the inheritance of some family property also deterred family visits. Don feels emotionally close to his grandmother who raised him, but this single tie is not strong enough to bring him back to work in Shanghai.

I'm still very very much attached to her, so I really want to see her. I feel like if I work here, [Canada] I probably would not have the ability to see her. But at the same time I don't want to live in China because it's not the kind of life—it's not the kind of environment I should say, that I'd want to live in.

Individuals such as Don, who are brought to Canada at a young age and whose parents never visit their homeland, are not likely to return. Acceptance by Canadian youths with which they went to school, and friendships with others like them, gives meaning to their lives. Without the interaction that creates connections to place, they have no alternative network pulls to Asia.

Don immigrated at a time when there were few PRC immigrants in Canada. Mandarin Chinese was rarely taught in local community facilities. His parents cobbled together a new social network in Toronto. These are not transnational networks, and they do not lead back to Asia. As Don said,

We didn't live with many other Chinese ..., but we saw some family friends all the time and my mother made sure they were part of our Chinese traditional holidays. We even invited her non-ethnic friends.

Of our subjects, stayers tend to be least fluent in their parents' tongue, which hold some back from returning. Thus, three of the four second generation and many of the 1.5 youth, like Don, who left at a young age, without following ongoing interactions, are not fluent either.

However, the main deterrent to return was not instrumental. Rather, few of their parents maintained personal contacts with the homeland while their children grew up, and the children followed suit. For Don and others like him, Canadian life is all they know first-hand. They do not reject their Asian heritage. They are brought up as Chinese-Canadians and think of their Asian heritage with pride, but know little about it. Don cannot envision himself living in Asia. At most, these subjects welcome a gap year or short visit to experience Asia, but ultimately intend to return to Canada. While they may feel Asian, they are hyphenated Asian-Canadian youth. Their country of origin is not their home.

Family politics resonate as another theme that keeps parents from returning. Social class figures strongly in the stories told by many stayers. In the cases of working-class settlers, their relative poverty in the host country mean they cannot return with gifts and will lose "face". In addition, two working-class PRC stayers have divorced parents who expect that family will look down on them if they return.

Youths who have never maintained contacts of their own in Asia are unlikely to see it as home, even if their parents have some communication there. Huamei's parents are academics who lived outside China with their children as post-doctoral students. Huamei was a toddler when she left China with them for a lengthy stint in Japan. She went to primary school in Japan, and her classmates "treated her as Japanese". Her father took another post-doctoral position in Canada. Her parents never cut their ties with their PRC colleagues and family, but since Huamei never returned to China with them, she has no social networks of her own in China. When Huamei started studying at the University of Toronto, her father took an academic position in China. After getting Canadian citizenship in 2007, her brother and mother rejoined her father. Although they



urged Huamei to follow after graduation, and earnestly persuaded her to learn about Chinese history and culture to build her pride in her homeland, it is a country where she has not lived after the first four years of her life. She returned for a summer and felt a stranger there, experiencing severe emotional grief and a profound sense of displacement. She anticipates that her return will complete the family circle, but she agonises about being torn from Canada, a place where she has everyone she knows outside of Japan. After some soul-searching, Huamei declared she is Canadian and will remain so (Cuba and Hummon 1993, p. 550).

I felt like I was being imposed a structure of being Chinese on me, "You are Chinese, you have to be this, you should be this", but I wasn't really feeling it inside. But now I'm at a more comfortable place right here, so I can say to myself, "I'm a Canadian".... But with Chinese people, I feel that I have to try so hard to pull the Chinese element out of me to fit myself into the language they're using, the expressions they're using, their type of speech—I don't have that in me.

She shares her views with her Chinese roommate, who also plans to stay in Canada. When Huamei visited her family in China, she felt she had little in common with the young adults around her (Johnston 2004).

Huamei does not deny her heritage, she defines her values as Asian, and feels she can maintain these while living in Canada. She feels strongly that she needs to maintain her place in her family circle and regrets having the choice of place forced on her.

Toronto the city is my hometown, my family is back in China. If I were to pick one or the other I would pick Toronto. I've already made that choice, a long term choice. Not that my family will never be an important part of me again. I do feel that I need to be close to them for a while just to feel a more Chinese connection. Based on what I said, now, I know I'm [downplaying] my Chinese roots, but I know in a few years I will go through a phase where I will want to learn about Chinese again, because I go through phases, so that might happen.

However, just as her parents' academic circles would bring them back overseas, similarly, Huamei envisions that she may think about returning to her roots again.

## Returnees

Ten subjects are certain that they will return to their Asian home after graduation. Of these, five are international students, following their prescribed course of returning home after completing their studies. Another is born in Canada and the remaining four are 1.5 generation youths. All have visited and lived in Asia for long periods, and have peer networks and significant relationships with others in Asia. Because they travel back and forth frequently, they have developed networks in the Asian labour market. They have good language abilities and not overly specialised training, making a wide range of positions accessible to them.

Most crucially, the parents of these subjects also maintain contact with their native place. Although they have immigrated, the youths returned to Asia with their parents after landing in Canada, and their mobility continues, most noticeable in their school years. They went to school in 3–4 different places, including their country of origin. Those with parents still in Asia return often for family visits and see their former schoolmates at the same time. During these visits, they construct new cognitive frames that present their original homeland as a place to live. After returning to Canada, they maintain contact with their classmates by email, phone, and social networking sites such as Facebook, building networks across the seas. Some worked in Asia during holidays and thus became familiar with opportunities in an area where they did not live permanently.

Kai, a second generation immigrant, is committed to returning to Hong Kong. His parents worked in Western transnational corporations in Hong Kong, emigrating to Canada for their BA degrees. The whole family returned to Hong Kong soon after Kai's birth, when his father got a job in a Western firm. Kai went to school in Hong Kong until junior high, then attended boarding school in Vancouver. At the time of the interview he is a University of Toronto senior and strongly identifies with Hong Kong culture. Although he was born in Canada, he was raised in Hong Kong in his early years, which allowed him to become



fluent in the culture, language, and life style. This identification is crucial and Kai sees himself as Cantonese. He majored in East Asian Studies and held summer internships in Hong Kong banks, where he plans to return after graduation. Kai's girlfriend is an international student at the University of Toronto, who is expected to return. From a "conservative Hong Kong family", she supported his Hong Kong identity and his decision to return. Without opposing pressure from his social environment, his networks, or values, he brings the various strands of his social life together as a returnee.

Problem areas for returnees include specialising in fields for which there are no jobs in their home towns. Xiao-Rong's mother wanted her to return home, and Xiao-Rong was committed to a life in China. But Chengdu, her home town, had not yet opened up to investment banking, her field of study. As a compromise, Xiao-Rong contemplates moving to a third home, in another Asian city, and have her mother join her there. After the devastating Szechwan earthquake she demonstrated her engagement with China by joining a volunteer group, living in a tent and dispensing supplies; she drove around the countryside and helped lost children reunite with their parents. She has since taken a trainee position in an Asian bank in Hong Kong and expects to be sent to Shanghai and have her mother join her. Xiao-Rong's solution exemplifies the compromises taken by our young women subjects. They resolve the conflict between the best place to practice their preferred profession and rejoining parents.

## Uncertain

Ten subjects are uncertain about whether to return to their country of origin or to remain in Canada after graduation. These uncertain youth tend to have an equal number of social relations in their former home as in Canada, and are drawn to both locations. They are embedded in transnational friendship networks with others of their own age, but they also have Canadian friends. All except one have parents living in Asia while they grew up.

They are bilingual and feel at home in both countries. They face conflicting pressures and social expectations as to where to settle after graduation.

Willie, a 1.5 generation 25-year-old Ph.D. science major, face conflicting family demands about where he shall live, and he is further encumbered by difficult career choices. When the whole family emigrated to Canada during the 1990s, while he was in Primary 4, his parents planned a transnational life. They retained their Hong Kong business, and soon after landing in Canada with his family, Willie's father returned to Hong Kong to run his trading company, exporting plastic toys and dolls to Europe and the American market. Willie and his mother and baby sister stayed in Toronto for two more years and then all returned to Hong Kong as Canadian citizens. Willie entered a new secondary school in Hong Kong, where he made friends, with whom he still maintains contact. Following his family's plans, after four years, he again returned to secondary school in Toronto and remained. At the time of the interview, he is working on a Ph.D in chemistry. His parents remain in Hong Kong, but his young sister has just moved to Canada for her last year of high school. Their parents expect Willie to care for his sister through her university years, five years distant. Willie's parents also talk about retiring their company and moving to Toronto.

Willie is uncertain about whether to stay in Canada or to return to Hong Kong or China after graduation. First, he conducts research in metal complexes, a field popular in North America but not in Asia. This creates uncertainties about where his career will take him, and he worries that his education may isolate him from the Hong Kong labour market. Furthermore, Willie is not sure where his networks will be located. His parents' plans to retire in Toronto and his obligations towards his younger sister are heavy family claims. In addition, his girlfriend is an international student from Macao, but Willie claimed that she will support whatever decision he makes.

Keith, a Hong Kong Chinese graduate student, eloquently voices similar network conflicts. His parents offered him their business, which he declined.

I told them a long time ago that I'm not going to take their business, unless absolutely necessary, 'cause I don't see a future in their business. Long time ago I didn't see a future, like seven-eight years ago, when they're asking me if I'm going to take over the business I said, "I'm not interested".

He instead considers a future in academia in North America. He thinks about returning to Hong Kong but has made no final decision:

Some time down the stretch, but not in the immediate future. Because I feel like, it's good to have some experience, particularly, and I've established a lot of networks around here, I don't want to give it up and go back there and restart everything all over again.

His father's business networks were not useful to him:

But the connections that he has wouldn't be the ones I want, not the kind of things that I want to do. Take away academia, that's another thing. But if I want to go into business, I might not want to do what he's doing. I might want to do human resources, or public relations, or administration, stuff like that.

Therefore, Keith tried to induce his parents to return to Toronto:

I'm trying to tell them, if I'm staying here then I might want them to come back sometime down the stretch. ... So even if my father closed down the business, he would not have a problem with retirement. That's the important thing to take into account. ... If I'm going back, things are easier, they can stay where they are... they're familiar, and I might get a place nearby their place, and then we could meet often, we could do a lot of things together as well. So, that's another option, but I'm keeping all my options open, because I don't know what I'm going to do. But definitely it's like, you try to tell them: one hand this is option A, one hand this is option B, but both are viable and they're practical, it's not something you can't do.

This son acts dutifully to his family, and tries to clarify his own and his parents' options. However, he is conflicted over his future career path, and is not able to be decisive.

Three international students initially wanted to return to their homeland. However, they lacked the desirable goods they could get by staying: a Canadian passport. They are pressured by their parents to remain, for whom obtaining a Canadian passport could help the rest of the family to land.

The parents of two subjects want to emigrate to Canada, and the parents of the third want a supportive place for their handicapped daughter. In these cases, pressures on the youths to remain in Canada can be immense.

For example, Xuan was an international student who graduated from the general arts programme at the University of Toronto in 2007. His parents had been Shanghai factory workers with relatives in Argentina, who emigrated there during the Cultural Revolution turmoil when Xuan was a child. Xuan visited Argentina from Toronto every Christmas and summer holiday to help in their restaurant and spend time with his buddies. He thinks of himself as Latin-Chinese, not as Canadian. Originally, Xuan assumed he will return to Argentina after graduation and does not factor Canada or China into his decision of where to remain and live. On the other hand, Xuan's girl friend is a PRC international student at the University of Toronto whose parents urge her to return to Shanghai to join them. When Xuan visited his relatives in Shanghai for the first time in 2005, he became aware of the vibrant economy and the connections there that he can reactivate. He decided that he would like to return there to work. Xuan then strongly favoured Shanghai. Events grew complex when Xuan's parents came to his graduation ceremony; they noted Toronto's vibrant Chinese environment in comparison to the scattered Chinese community in Buenos Aires. His parents proposed that Xuan become a citizen so that they could retire in Canada and bought him a car and condo in one of Toronto's Chinese communities. To respect their wishes, Xuan is no longer sure he will return to Asia, and he is looking for a job in Toronto. He faces a dilemma wherein choosing a PRC woman weighs on the side of return to Asia, as she hopes to live near her kin, while Xuan feels the need to support his parents when they retire. Thus, he faces opposing pressures from his social environment, his networks, and values. He is in limbo. Although he was loath to oppose his parents' wishes, he eventually moved to Shanghai with his partner.

Social networks provide social structures that reinforce people's moves to a locale; it feels right because this is what their friends and kin have

done. These subjects have dual sets of networks on both sides of the world, and face difficult choices, the essence of role conflict. Their dilemma underlies our theme; to have too many networks pulling them in different directions is too much of a good thing.

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### **Conclusion: The Importance of Family Social Networks in Return Migration**

Continued contact with the home country promotes return migration, and infrequent exchanges dampen returns. Immigrant parents' contact with home and host countries while their children grow up forge the networks that draw youth back to the home country. The return of one or both parents to live or work in the homeland during the child's dependent years creates the strongest ties. These parents brought the child back with them, or arranged for frequent visits, thereby allowing the youth to create viable network contacts abroad. The more contacts these youths have with their Asian homelands, the more likely they are to see Asia as a possible future home.

Parents who keep a foothold in their home country lead the way for their children to accompany them, to learn their native language in a natural environment, and to build their own networks. Real physical returns are crucial, because they cement social networks connecting people in two countries through face-to-face interactions (Haug 2008; Smith 2006). Furthermore, they meet new acquaintances while visiting, enabling them to imagine what life might be like in that locale. In contrast, subjects who returned home only occasionally, with years between visits, are unable to maintain an existence in two locales. Hence, the more contacts that emigrants from Asia maintain with their homeland, the more likely their children will return (Hsu and Ip 2006).

The parents who do not maintain contacts through visits do not offer their children a transnational bridge, so the youth do not have the cognitive space to imagine returning. People move to meet a range of needs, which can change, and

which affect their own personal migration biographies and those of their significant others. Hence, the potential migrations and return moves of the Asian youth we study are conditional, and may be reversed or changed.

No one single factor leads to return, but social interaction, significant relationships, and the sense of place identity tend to affect whether youth return or stay. The labour market plays a subordinate role in their decisions but may tip the scale in one direction. Their parents play a key role. Interactions with other Chinese in Asia and Canada tend to maintain subjects' fluency in Chinese and involvement in Chinese culture. The connections between social structures and lands promote not only exodus but also returns. Initially, parents forge these transnational ties. The more than two dozen youths we interviewed began by following their parents on their voyages, and then developed their own pathways. These pathways may mirror those of their parents or may differ entirely, as when Xuan went to school in Toronto.

By delving into these social factors, we turn our focus towards place and social structures. We argue that parents' actions shape the choice of where these youths want to live. By planting the seeds of transnational relationships, parents contribute to the networks that the youths build. Maintenance of kin and daily social relations are particularly important to the youth. These interactions embed them into social systems in Asia as well as Canada, but the crucial influence turns out to be parents' location decisions. This includes the nature of family migration and the circumstances and nature of return visits. In our presentation of the topic, the sense of identity with home develops from these relationships and their ability to maintain the cultural tool kit.

This chapter emphasises the role of the family in youths' transnational movements. Our future studies focus on those subjects that actually returned. Some issues remain to be investigated, including whether the networks, personal relations, and job training mesh when these youths do return, and how they weave their attachment to two homes, Canada and Asia, in their daily lives.

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## The Uncanny Homely and Unhomely Feeling: Gender and Generation Politics in Return Migrant Families in Hong Kong

Chan Wai-wan and Chan Kwok-bun

Last year today at this door  
the face and peach flowers  
were in bright red mutual reflection.  
This year the face  
has vanished into an unknown place  
while the peach flowers  
smile as always in the spring breeze.

Translation by Chan Kwok-bun of a Tang Dynasty poem  
titled “The Southern Village” by Cui Hu;  
16 June, 2012 at the Changi Airport waiting room, Singapore.

Home No More Home to Me  
Home no more home to me, whither must I wander?  
Hunger my driver, I go where I must.  
Cold blows the winter wind over hill and heather;  
Thick drives the rain, and my roof is in the dust.  
Loved of wise men was the shade of my roof-tree.  
The true word of welcome was spoken in the door ---  
Dear days of old, with the faces in the firelight,  
Kind folks of old, you come again no more.

Home was home then, my dear, full of kindly faces,  
Home was home then, my dear, happy for the child,  
Fire and the windows bright glittered on the moorland;  
Song, tuneful song, built a palace in the wild.  
Now, when day dawns on the brow of the moorland,  
Lone stands the house, and the chimney-stone is cold.  
Lone let it stand, now the friends are all departed,  
The kind hearts, the true hearts, that loved the place of old.

Spring shall come, come again, calling up the moor-fowl,  
Spring shall bring the sun and rain, bring the bees and flowers;  
Red shall the heather bloom over hill and valley,  
Soft flow the stream through the even-flowing hours;  
Fair the day shine as it shone on my childhood ---  
Fair shine the day on the house with open door;  
Birds come and cry there and twitter in the chimney ---  
But I go for ever and come again no more.

Robert Louise Stevenson

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In 1994, one in every 130 Hong Kong residents moved to Canada. In that year, 44,223 people—most of them professionals and businesspeople—fled across the Pacific to escape the anxiety of the handover of the city by the British back to China. At the height of the pre-handover exodus from 1992 to 1997, nearly 300,000 people left. Almost 70% chose Canada as their new home. At the time, pundits made grim predictions about Hong Kong's future with many of its best and brightest living in Vancouver and Toronto. But what would happen if the prodigal sons and daughters returned? More than 10 years after the handover, Hong Kong is full of Canadians.

In this age of globalization and transnationalism, world cities are in fierce global competition for talent. Hong Kong has recently positioned itself as one such city, and return migrants constitute a significant segment of its human capital. A 1999 General Household Survey by the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Government estimated that there were 118,400 returnees in Hong Kong (Statistics Department, Hong Kong Government 2000), apparently an underestimate due to underreporting. This underestimate seems unusual, given that Canada renews 20,000 passports in Hong Kong annually. Some social scientists put the figure of returnees in Hong Kong at 300,000. The chairman of the Chinese Canadian Association in Hong Kong estimated in July 2007 that there were 250,000 Chinese Canadian returnees in Hong Kong alone.

Also, in 2007 an estimated 11% of the Hong Kong population have right of abode outside of Hong Kong. According to the Hong Kong Transition Project's 2007 survey, the average age of returnees from Canada was 38, and 56% were in the broad working years (20–59).<sup>1</sup> These include the younger generation who returned after higher education in Canada (Salaff et al. 2007, 2010; Waters 2004).

Many studies on return migrants apply economic, rational choice models, whereby individuals compare the returns to their labor in the countries from which they migrated and their place

of origin, and go to the place with the highest returns (Aydemir and Robinson 2005; Zweig et al. 2005; Borjas and Bratsberg 1996; Tian and Ma 2006). This framework problematically assumes that people have complete information, and ignores the role of social ties in their return and resettlement. A socio-economic approach would use a neo-institutionalist framework that links variations in returnees' integration with the structures of society (Alba and Nee 2003). Key factors affecting labor force integration can be grouped into industry-level factors and social relations.

The family is a magnet. For those with kin in Hong Kong, practical and emotional factors and other interactions influence sons and daughters to return and rejoin significant others (Chang 1992). In contrast, those without social relations in Hong Kong need to be wooed, another policy arena that needs attention (Salaff et al. 2007, 2010). Few policies for attracting returnees have addressed family issues. Although a husband returns to Hong Kong because he can develop a better career, his wife and children may be more reluctant. Are both spouses able to work? How do we go about helping returnees develop a harmonious family?

The family, like many social institutions, is a very political place which is full of various kinds of power struggle. The family is often emphasized to be a cozy nest, the most harmonious place. In reality, it is a most hierarchical site, where relationships between its members are not as comfortable as in the idealized image propagated by society.

By contrast, the rights of family members are clearly demarcated. Family members are often required to carry out their individual actions in accordance with their status. In their mobile lives, the return members of the family contact and interact with the different cultural customs and values of other places. These life experiences, to different degrees, reconstruct their original values, beliefs and ideals. As these return migrants move between different places, their original culture and the cultures of other places clash with each other. When they return to their homes in Hong Kong, they would have already culturally transformed themselves and behave in accordance

<sup>1</sup> Survey conducted by Hong Kong Baptist University's Hong Kong in Transition Project. Survey on Services of Canadian Consulate in Hong Kong, February–March, 2007.

with new ideas and expectations. Their left-behind family, however, remains in the original mode of thinking. Hence tension develops between the traveler and the non-traveler, between change and fixedness.

This chapter is based on our in-depth interviews with 40 returnees who had lived and/or worked in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Sweden, England, France, Spain and Columbia, and had returned to Hong Kong for between one and 25 years (Table 6.1). There were 16 males and 24 females. The youngest respondent was 25 years old, and the oldest was 61. Most were first-time returnees, though seven had returned to Hong Kong for the second time.

These interviews offered unexpected insights into the marital/gender and generational politics of immigrant families, an unfolding drama of conflicts and power struggles between husbands and wives, parents and children, leavers and stayers, cosmopolitans and locals.

## Four Vignettes

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of the interview contents, we offer profiles of four return migrants. These vignettes or profiles are meant to highlight, by reactivating various biographical fragments and snapshots of life, certain features of family experience or contours of family history. While admitting that they are edited records of individuals' life histories, they are by no means arbitrary fragments; nor are they intended to fit individual experience into a pre-determined "frame" of mind. Rather, these profiles, as specimens of life and historical memory, provide us with significant information from our returnees' pasts, conveying to us the consciousness of an individual or a group, so that we can make reflexive accounts and analyzes of this specific group of people. As analysts trained in sociological research, we are aware that we are

**Table 6.1** Characteristics of sample of 40 respondents

	Country of immigra- tion	Sex	Age	Marital status	Year of emigrat- ion	Age at emigra- tion	Year of return migration	Age at return migra- tion	No. of years since return migra- tion	Present occupation
1	USA	F	28	Single	1990	12	2005	27	2	Senior tax consultant
2	Canada	M	41	Single	1993	28	1997	31	10	University professor
3	USA	F	38	Single	1987	19	1st: 1999 <sup>a</sup> 2nd: 2000	28	7	Associate—headhunting company
4	Canada	F	42	Married	1983	19	1995	31	12	University professor
5	Canada	F	50	Married	1975	19	1995	39	12	Embassy department manager
6	Canada	F	45	Married	1974	14	1989	29	18	Associate—headhunting company
7	USA	M	25	Single	1995	16	2005	25	10	Marketing manager
8	USA	M	50+	Married	1973	17	1985	29	22	Accountant—self- employed
9	Canada	M	35	Single	1989	18	2001	30	6	Part-time translator at university
10	USA	F	30+	Single	1995	15	1st: 2003 <sup>a</sup> 2nd: 2005	23	2	Associate—headhunting company
11	Australia	M	40	Single	1991	24	1997	30	10	Statistical assistant in government
12	New Zealand	F	28	Married	1995	17	2003	25	4	Architect

(continued)

**Table 6.1** (continued)

	Country of immigra- tion	Sex	Age	Marital status	Year of emigra- tion	Age at emigra- tion	Year of return migration	Age at return migra- tion	No. of years since return migra- tion	Present occupation
13	Australia	F	40	Single	1995	29	2000	34	7	Assistant insurance manager
14	Canada	M	40+	Married	1988	20+	1995	30+	12	Insurance manager
15	England	F	44	Divorced	1979	16	1992	29	15	Architect—self-employed
16	Sweden	F	34	Married	1990	18	1st: 1994 <sup>a</sup> 2nd: 2006	34	1	Editor
17	England	M	40+	Married	1960s	8	1995	30+	12	Regional manager (finance)
18	USA	F	40+	Married	1989	20+	1995	30+	12	Real estate agent
19	USA	M	42	Married	1979	16	1st: 1987 <sup>a</sup> 2nd: 1995	32	12	Assistant vice president (bank)
20	Australia	M	26	Single	1999	19	2005	25	6	Logistics officer
21	England	F	35	Single	1981	9	1997	24	10	Senior graphic designer
22	New Zealand	F	28	Married	1996	19	2000	21	7	Senior accountant
23	Canada	F	50+	Married	1972	15+	1982	30+	25	Accountant—self-employed
24	Canada	F	25	Single	1990	8	2005	23	2	Project coordinator
25	Canada	M	50+	Married	1989	30+	1997	40+	10	Information technology manager
26	Canada	M	51	Married	1990	34	1993	37	14	Businessman
27	France	F	40+	Single	1987	26	1st: 1990 <sup>a</sup> 2nd: 1992	30	15	Boutique—self-employed
28	Canada	F	38	Married	1990	21	1997	28	10	Assistant vice president (call center)
29	Spain	F	50+	Married	1974	17	1992	35	15	Translation service—self-employed
30	Canada	F	30+	Single	1985	10+	1996	25+	11	Accountant—self-employed
31	USA	F	31	Single	2001	25	2005	29	2	Part-time university lecturer
32	Canada	F	61	Married	1983	37	1992	46	13	Retired. PhD student
33	Canada	F	39	Married	1992	24	1996	28	9	Embassy department manager
34	USA	M	25	Single	2000	18	2005	23	2	Urban Designer
35	Canada	M	26	Single	1998	17	2005	24	2	Garment maker—self-employed
36	Canada	F	29	Married	1995	17	2000	22	7	Marketing
37	USA	M	34	Single	1976	3	1st: 1995 <sup>a</sup> 2nd: 2001	28	6	Research assistant
38	Columbia	M	47	Married	1986	26	2006	46	1	Trading—self-employed
39	New Zealand	F	27	Single	1994	14	1st: 2002 <sup>a</sup> 2nd: 2005	25	2	IT support in bank
40	Canada	M	31	Married	1994	17	2001	24	6	Deputy executive director

<sup>a</sup>First-time return to Hong Kong

entitled to no “liberty to invent”<sup>2</sup> in interview-based writing and analysis. Our task is to provide an account or explanation of certain unique historical phenomena through these real life materials.

#### Biographical Profile 1: Mrs. Man

Sex: Female

Age: 40s

Current Occupation: Real estate agent

Education: Two years of university education

Year of Migration: 1989

Place of Migration: Hawaii, United States

Year of Return to Hong Kong: 1995

Marital Status: Married without children

Religion: Devout Catholic

Mrs. Man migrated to the US because of marriage. Her husband had first returned to Hong Kong in 1987, but there was uncertainty about 1997. The Tiananmen incident deepened the anxieties of many over the future of Hong Kong. Mrs. Man persuaded her husband, who was then her boyfriend, to go back to the US to enjoy a more stable life. She thus joined the “migration fever” to move to the US.

Mrs. Man views herself as a simple person; she is not very ambitious. She is content with her job and her family. The US lifestyle suited her goals in life very well. Her work was going fine, and her personality and the American work culture were in harmony. She was able to adapt quickly to American society, and she was happy with her relaxed and simple home life. Mrs. Man enjoyed her happy life in the US. In contrast, her husband was miserable there. He felt that his career was held back because of racial discrimination. He did not have much rapport with his work colleagues, as they shared no common interests or topics of conversation. Mrs. Man’s husband changed jobs four times within the span of five-six years, and none of them gave him any satisfaction. He felt his career was going downhill. Forced to choose between her husband’s career and her personal goals, Mrs. Man sacrificed

her goal to return with her husband to Hong Kong in 1995.

Mrs. Man had lived in Hong Kong for more than 20 years before her migration to the US. Although she had only been absent from Hong Kong for six years, her re-adaptation was not as easy as she had thought it would be. The challenges that she faced at work far exceeded her expectations:

People who knew me before my migration from Hong Kong viewed my personality traits as Western. I’m a direct person as I speak up about how I feel. However, I found that I must curb this behavior in Hong Kong. I felt very comfortable in the US since my personality blends very well with the American culture. I had a good living experience in the US, whereas in Hong Kong I feel constrained.

Mrs. Man perceives her personality style to be Western—direct, vocal and team-spirited. In the US, she could integrate well into the local work culture. In contrast, she encountered many obstacles when working in Chinese companies in Hong Kong. She found it hard to cope with the rank-consciousness, the power struggles and the empty, meaningless teamwork slogans. Her colleagues regarded her cordial relationship with the management, who had also returned from overseas, to be curry-favoring. When she genuinely needed guidance from her immediate superiors, they would misconstrue her request for guidance as a challenge to them. Viewing her as a personal threat, her superiors always picked on her. She was unhappy at work.

Moreover, Hong Kong’s work culture means “work is the top priority.” Overtime is highly valued, even glorified. Self-worth is measured by how busy a person is and how much responsibility he or she takes for the company. Mrs. Man had always treasured a quality family life; however, her busy life in Hong Kong widened the gap between ideals and reality. This gap also upset her plans for a family. She had hoped to slow down her career and have children. However, she could hardly find the time and energy to consider family-related issues when she was driven by the day-to-day demands of a fast-paced lifestyle. When she finally decided to have children, the time had passed. Missing the opportunity to

<sup>2</sup> Paul Richard Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 172.

conceive a child is Mrs. Man's deepest regret. She feels that she has paid a huge price for her work, a price that she will never be compensated for. She realizes that the commercial world is ruthless, that it operates on profit and returns. In 2003, Hong Kong experienced an unprecedented crisis—SARS—during which it underwent major economic restructuring. Many companies had to move their departments to China, and Mrs. Man was asked to relocate to China at that time. As she had moved back to Hong Kong primarily in consideration of her husband's career opportunities, she didn't want to separate from him. She requested that her company allow her to stay in Hong Kong, and she was eventually retrenched. She could not find another job in the banking industry and ended up teaching in a nursery school run by a friend. She quit after nine months because she did not have much job satisfaction, and she is now working as a real estate agent. The transition from the highly regulated banking industry to an industry with ambiguous guidelines and unpredictable competitive behavior has not been easy for her.

This setback in Mrs. Man's professional life has been a heavy blow. It has required more adjustment than the changes in her social life, as she feels she is wasting her ten years of banking experience. She gives the following analysis of her forced career switch:

I regard resignation as a form of change. I was let go by the bank at 30 something. I could feel the painful experience of my friends who had also been sacked. However, when I look back, I count myself lucky. In fact, there are so many other things that I can learn besides working in a bank. Although the transition process has involved a lot of fear and anxieties, it's been worthwhile to gain more experience.

In reality, Mrs. Man was forced to change her career. She was helpless. When our fate is not in our hands and when change brings mental stress, we tend to think positively to manage the negatives. Only when we can make out the true meaning of our pain we will derive the energy to overcome adversity. Mrs. Man's active religious life has given her a lot of strength. She prays to gain the calm energy she needs to deal with her resentment about her unhappy situation.

Human beings are so weak. When situations are working against us, we would find a way to put down our ego. Mrs. Man's husband's career, in contrast, has been smooth sailing in the ten years since their return to Hong Kong. He is now the assistant vice-president of a multinational bank. His busy workload takes him on business trips to different countries. The husband's achievements may, to a certain extent, justify the couple's decision to return to Hong Kong. The high level of remuneration may also be gratifying, but the satisfaction is incomplete. Although Mrs. Man has been back in Hong Kong for ten years, she still misses the life she had with her husband in the West. There, they would finish work around 5:00 p.m., go to a ball game and then cook dinner. She dreams of retiring to the US and enjoying a greater quality of life with her husband. When a wide gap exists between dreams and reality, nostalgia becomes an emotional tranquilizer; dreams boost patience. Considering the current career success of the husband, it may not be easy for the couple to make a U-turn. Mrs. Man can remind her husband of how contented they used to be, but how can she persuade a high-flyer to fly lower?

Mrs. Man belongs to the type of return migrant who comes back to Hong Kong for the benefit of others. In her case, she came back for the development of her husband's career. However, her own professional life has posed the greatest challenge. She has had to cope with a high level of work stress, tough challenges and keen competition. Her coping strategy is not task-oriented, but rather emotion-focused. She tries to rationalize her behavior by participating in religious activities, reminiscing about the past and dreaming of her future in the West. Although her husband's career is advancing, Mrs. Man's career is less secure. It may even be regressing. This can be an unhealthy situation.

When Mrs. Man was asked about her suggestions for those who are planning to return to Hong Kong, she offered the following: For sure, one should not return!

Mrs. Man has tremendous internal conflict. She feels that she has paid a very high price for returning to Hong Kong.

**Biographical Profile 2: Mr. Man****Age:** 42**Current Profession:** Assistant Vice-President of a bank**Education Level:** Master degree**Country of Emigration:** US**Year of First Emigration:** 1979 (Aged 18)**Year of First Return to Hong Kong:** 1987**Year of Second Migration:** 1989**Year of Second Return to Hong Kong:** 1995**Marital Status:** Married with no children**Religion:** Catholic

Mr. Man migrated to the US in 1979. He was 16 at the time, studying secondary three. He considered the move entirely his parents' decision as he was merely following their wish to study in the States. His deep emotional attachments were with his birthplace, Hong Kong. Moreover, he found that developing his career in a foreign land was tough. He reckoned that "no matter how talented I am, I'll soon hit the ceiling." To explore better career opportunities, Mr. Man decided to return to Hong Kong after obtaining his Master degree in 1987.

Hong Kong enjoyed vibrant economic growth in 1987. Mr. Man joined a multinational accounting firm, and despite a heavy workload he was well remunerated, increasing his salary by 100% within two years. His love life also blossomed when he met his wife-to-be. He had intended making Hong Kong his permanent home, but anxiety about the Tiananmen democracy movement and the 1997 handover led him to change his mind and follow the "migration trend" to leave for the US again. The decision was also motivated by his preference for a steady and peaceful life in the US. In 1989, Mr. Man gave up the job he liked and returned to the US with his wife.

The US was not unfamiliar to Mr. Man as he studied there from 1979 to 1987. But he did not truly like the place and his career did not progress smoothly throughout his second emigration:

I wasn't happy working in the US as career opportunities were limited. I had worked for one of the big eight accounting firms with 300 over employees in Hong Kong. In contrast to the large staff scale, the branch in Hawaii had only 50 staff. One can imagine how I felt moving from a big organization to a small branch, knowing

that opportunities for advancement were slim. Even when opportunities might exist, they would be limited. My relationship with my colleagues was not any better. As our family backgrounds were different, we had no common conversation topics. After staying in Hawaii for six years, my wife and I returned to Hong Kong in 1995. By then, I had worked in the States for over five years, having taken four jobs and changed jobs three times. I found no satisfaction in any of the jobs I had.

Dissatisfaction with career progress was the main push factor for Mr. Man to move back to Hong Kong. Other factors that prompted his return included the lack of savings in the US and the examples set by returning friends. Due to the high cost of living and heavy taxes, Mr. Man had no savings despite his five to six years of working in the US. His decision to return followed a process of weighing the pros of having better opportunities in Hong Kong and the cons of going against his wife's desire to stay on in the US.

For Mr. Man, the hardest aspect in his re-adaptation to Hong Kong was the fast-paced lifestyle and the exceedingly long working hours:

When I first came back, I wasn't used to the fast-paced lifestyle. My five years of work life in the US were different. The working hours were from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The staff started to wind down, going to the washroom at 4:45 p.m. By 5 p.m., everybody would have left the office. Although I had experienced the long working hours in the two years of my previous return, I still had to get used to those hours. After all, the five years in the US were leisurely. My wife and I finished work at 5 p.m. We then played tennis in the neighborhood before going home to cook dinner. By 10 p.m., we called it a day. In Hong Kong we leave the office between 8 and 9 p.m., go home and cook dinner. By the time we finish dinner, it's already 11 p.m. In principle, we work a 5-day week. In practice, we still go to the office on Saturday and Sunday.

Exceedingly long working hours are a unique feature of the Hong Kong work culture. Mr. Man regards having the right mindset as the key to coping:

I must say that it took me some effort to adjust. However, I told myself this: firstly, I had worked in Hong Kong before; secondly, if you enjoy your work, the job satisfaction will offset the pressure from the long hours. This helped me to come to terms with the Hong Kong work habits within a year.



Mr. Man's goal is to achieve success in Hong Kong and reciprocate the support of his wife, who sacrificed her preferred Western lifestyle to follow him back. Her sacrifice has energized him to overcome the obstacles in his path to career success. Man's career is going strong. He first worked in a multinational investment bank for ten years. Then he moved to his current position as Assistant Vice-President in a foreign investment bank. Mr. Man attributes his career development to his professional knowledge and his "US plus Chinese work style":

I relate differently to people of different backgrounds. I am consciously adapting to who my audience is. There are many foreigners in the company. When I'm with Dutch or British nationals, I'll show to them my Western background; I'll behave like an American. With Chinese, I'll adopt my Chinese identity as a returnee from overseas. I'll impress them with my Hong Kong origin. These are effective ways of building rapport with people of different cultural backgrounds.

To succeed in a multinational company operating in Hong Kong, one needs to strike a balance between Eastern and Western work attitudes, bridging the difference between the mindsets. Mr. Man is able to apply a mix of the influences from his Western education and from his upbringing in Hong Kong to drive his career development. This enables him to excel in his performance, to thrive on opportunities and to gain recognition from his bosses.

Career achievements boost one's self-esteem. Although Mr. Man is very busy, he finds time to keep in touch with his secondary school alumni. He often plays tennis with his old friends and even organizes many events.

Mr. Man represents a characteristic type of return migrants, seeking career opportunities in his homecoming. His key motivator in returning was to land an ideal job, which eased the rest of his concerns. In his return migration experience, Mr. Man has built high energy on three levels: self-esteem, emotional bonding and social participation. He is always self-driving in his coping process.

First, he actively manages his work progress and achieves results. High remuneration gives him gratification and self-worth. Second, he is able to rationalize in his coping. Third, he is maintaining his social networks with old friends,

especially with his secondary schoolmates who have returned from overseas studies. This network of return overseas graduates is cohesive and constructive. The network members often create a "chain return migration" in encouraging other overseas friends to return to Hong Kong.

When Mr. Man was asked about his suggestions for people contemplating returning to Hong Kong, he said they should make mental preparations for the congested living environment and exceedingly long working hours. But he has a soft spot for Hong Kong, and thinks he will retire here.

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## Gender Politics Within the Family and Marriage

Return migration generates interpersonal conflicts and tensions. Most noticeable is conflict between husbands and wives, the gender politics within the family and marriage. A husband who returns to Hong Kong because he cannot develop a satisfactory career in the West could bring with him a wife (and children) who are reluctant to return. The wife could miss the quality of marital life in the West, where the husband had much shorter working hours. She would be making a self-sacrifice for her husband and also for her family.

There is a deep paradox here—the wife's self-sacrifice has become a powerful motivating force that pushes her husband to work hard, but in so doing he spends increasingly less time with his wife and children. So the wife and husband collude in the wife's misery. Not surprisingly, there is an ongoing drama between husband returnees who want to stay in Hong Kong and wives who want to leave again:

I'm not the career-minded type of person. I think Australia suits me better because I'm not competitive. I wouldn't mind being an employee, working under someone, for my entire life. I wouldn't mind not having any promotion prospects. However, it seems that in Hong Kong you're under pressure to upgrade yourself and to get a promotion. Even if you don't want a promotion, you're forced to take the promotion...I came back because of my husband. His family is here. Therefore, we need to come back somehow...I don't like Hong Kong as a place; I don't like the Hong Kong people. I don't like a lot of things here. (Case 12)

In the States, my husband's career wasn't very smooth; he was very unhappy. We decided to return

to Hong Kong in January 1995...It's been many years since our return. I would like to retire in the States. I'm not an ambitious person. It's hard work in Hong Kong. I'm simple as I'm fine with a job and a family. However, you'll be bypassed and treated as a nobody in Hong Kong if you don't exert yourself. Whenever you feel you can do it, you'll drive yourself hard. Life is so busy in Hong Kong that you have no time to plan for family-related issues. There was a time when both my husband and I wanted to have a child. Nevertheless, he had to go on business trips and I had to go on business trips too. We had no time for any rest. My chance has passed. I can no longer conceive a child. If we hadn't come back, I would have had children. I have no children now. (Case 18)

In the following, we offer another two vignettes: Ms. Ying and Daisy.

### Biographical Profile 3: Ms. Ying

Age: 34

Present Job: Senior Graphic Designer

Education Level: University

Year of Migration: 1981 (nine years old)

Migration Destination: England

Year of Return to Hong Kong: 1997 (25 years old)

Marital Status: Single

Religion: None

In 1981, Ms. Ying, her mother and her four brothers and sisters left Hong Kong to move to England to be reunited with her father. Ms. Ying was only nine years old when she left Hong Kong. At this young age, she said, migration "seemed like something that could be lots of fun."

Ms. Ying resided in England for 16 years. Merging into local life in England was not a difficult matter for her, but her parents, together with the other Chinese people around her, continually reminded her: "you are Chinese." She explained:

When we were young, our parents made us attend classes at the Chinese school on weekends, but we really didn't like attending Chinese classes back then, preferring rather to play. You understand, we went to the English school on regular school days, and then on weekends we had to attend Chinese school too. We really didn't like it, but our parents always forced us to study Chinese, all the way until we were sixteen. In addition, throughout the process of growing up they were always reminding us that we were Chinese, not British. From youth to

adulthood I always knew I was different from the others, that I wasn't "part of them," not totally an English person. Yet it was easy for me to blend into their culture, as everybody had similar views on most matters. However, in the process of growing up there were always Chinese people around, and they were always reminding you, "you're Chinese," "You should be better at using chopsticks," etc. Such reminders were always occurring, and mother and father were always reminding us that we are Chinese.

Sixteen years is not a short time—from primary through middle school from childhood curiosity through inquisitive adolescence—and Ms. Ying felt that her intrinsic self was in fact not much different from that of English youth, as their patterns of thought were very similar. However, her yellow skin and dark eyes—these extrinsic markers—seemed to have eternal, unchanging significance. On the one hand, they were a constant reminder to Ying that she should be aware of her difference from the blue-eyed, blond-haired Englishmen, and, on the other hand, as far as the locals were concerned, these objective differences to a certain extent reinforced subjective differences:

I never felt that there was any real difference between myself and my English colleagues. If there were, I think it was mostly due to my being under the influence of my mood at the moment, but we got along quite normally. And yet, while we did get along, there was always a certain distance, a gap between us, because although you got along with them in real life there was always the feeling that you couldn't truly understand them, couldn't completely know them, because we were after all somewhat different. While there I got to know some Chinese who had all grown up in England, and you felt that there were things that you and they could relate to.

Individual consciousness is influenced by external factors, and although agency does have a function, limits and restrictions continue to exert their influence.

In 1995, Ms. Ying and a close friend made the joint decision to return to Hong Kong:

After university graduation, my parents wanted me to return to Hong Kong to work, because I had grown up here. After all I was a Hongkonger, and we also had relatives here in Hong Kong, so they wanted me to come back and seek employment. What's more, at that time I was dating a Westerner.

My parents were really afraid I might marry a foreigner, and they had always hoped that I would marry a Chinese, though by then I had already been dating the foreigner for a few years. Also, it was very hard to find a job in England after graduation, so for the first year after graduation I had two part-time jobs, and my parents urged me to return to Hong Kong. Frankly, it didn't matter much to me, as I was bored with London and wanted to expand my horizons, to experience something fresh, so I decided to come back. My best friends in England all had similar backgrounds to my own; all had spent their childhood in Hong Kong before migrating to England, where they grew up. I came back with a good friend who was one of them, and within a few years they had all come back too. All of us loved good times, wanted to have a taste of life here, to experience what sort of place Hong Kong is after all, since it was basically their home, but none had ever really experienced life here.

A return from migration always involves a mingling of personal feelings with utilitarian goals. It involves a consideration of career, on the one hand, and the pursuit of one's feelings towards "home," on the other. The return from migration is also rarely a matter of an individual's decision alone, but is usually the result of interaction with others. Parental hopes that their children will leave the non-Chinese world of Western countries are complex and contradictory. Ms. Ying's parents, who had an implicit emotional attachment to their "Chinese" identity, had the deeply embedded hope that they wouldn't have a foreigner for a son-in-law, but this was a hope they would be embarrassed to reveal. Parental encouragement, the company of good friends, and boredom with life in England, all of these factors can serve to encourage the decision to return to Hong Kong. Traveling with your backpack and brimming with ambition, you arrive with optimism and ideals. But the road "home" is not always paved with sweetness:

I think at first, just after I returned, I was a bit naive in my thinking. I felt I should be able to blend in rather easily, because I was after all a HongKonger who had grown up here, but once I went out in search of a job, and opened my mouth to communicate with others, they would be surprised that I'm not a HongKonger after all! I had to go through a period of adaptation in job hunting before later realizing that I wasn't really "one of

them." I experienced many situations like this: every time I opened my mouth to speak Cantonese, people would laugh at my non-standard pronunciation or my misuse of certain words. This kind of problem existed for the first few years after returning to Hong Kong, and it required adaptation. I know several other people who, like me, had returned to Hong Kong to work, and they weren't very happy either, because these problems were encountered every day, and you were constantly reminded by others that "You are different!" Some people are more sensitive to situations like this: "I want to be part of the whole society." But when others constantly remind you that you are not a true member of society, you will feel that you are not accepted.

Ms. Ying had felt all along that she was a Hongkonger. While in England, she always felt that there was a "gap" between her and the locals, and she felt a lack of "resonance." Returning to Hong Kong, she thought she was coming back to the "home" where she had grown up, but in fact the local HongKongers didn't regard her as really one of their own. In the West, Ms. Ying had felt that she wasn't 100% English, but when she returned to Hong Kong, she was faced with the same kind of identity confusion: she is not 100% Chinese either. Both sides were both familiar and unfamiliar to her, but this psychological estrangement seemed to her to be the inevitable score of her "Destiny Symphony." In addition to these emotional challenges, another challenge for the returning migrant is unfamiliarity with the workplace culture:

In my experience, office politics in Hong Kong are very obvious, and I'm not accustomed to this Hong Kong-style workplace culture. I'm a graphic designer, and on my first assignment I just couldn't assimilate. The style of my designs was not the style they wanted. They needed a Chinese style and felt that mine was too Western. The most outstanding feature of Chinese-style corporate culture is "polishing the boss' shoes." You pretend to be busy even when there's nothing to do. For example, you work until six o'clock and your assignment for the day is already finished, but the boss hasn't left yet, the subordinates don't dare to leave, they just sit there for another half hour or even an hour. All of this seems to be nothing but a pretense, something I just can't do. I've learned that office politics are really hard to deal with, because I'm a candid person who doesn't know how to act, just very straightforward. People say I'm too straightforward because I grew

up overseas. HongKongers would never be so straightforward. Some things are unclear to me, and I just can't understand them, so it's quite possible that I'll say something offensive to others without even knowing it. Then they won't tell me directly, but will find an indirect way to let me know later, or maybe they'll find some other way of indicating it to me. So my first two jobs were hard on me, really confusing. I didn't know how to handle these things, and work became an unnatural act, so it couldn't last very long. Later on, I found a foreign company, which involved more mixing.

In the nine years since her return to Hong Kong, Ms. Ying has held five different jobs, and she currently works for an English-language newspaper. She found the work culture in a Chinese company unbearable, especially having to flatter superiors and pretend to work. She found such practices disgusting, and her "straightforward" foreign personality made it impossible for her to blend into the corporate environment. Ms. Ying has learned to face such challenges through trial and error and, as a result of many years of work experience in Hong Kong, she now has an appreciation of the importance of seeking "an alternative strategy." In other words, to get along with her colleagues and to perform at her job, the best method of compromise is to "comprehend Hong Kong's culture," and to "use alternate methods of self-expression." If things become truly unbearable, however, then she feels that "flight is the supreme strategy," as evidenced by her move to a company with a more Western corporate culture.

Discrimination is the result of fear, and fear comes from unfamiliarity. Return migrants, such as Ms. Ying, don't seem to be purely Chinese to the locals, but nor are they purely English. They are rather both Chinese and English. They are not perfect persons, but neither are they real demons; they are neither fish nor fowl. The impression she makes on the people around her is not necessarily verbalized, but it is felt profoundly by all of the parties involved. Just after her return, Ms. Ying earnestly wanted to "localize" herself by taking part in leisure activities and associating with friends, but after a period of time she discovered that there was a lack of mutual understanding

between herself and those local friends who had no immigrant experience—there was a lack of intimacy. Therefore, she began to change her circle of associates from those who were scrupulously "Hong Kong style" to those who were similar to herself. She gradually became inclined to associate with returned migrants who had a similar background to her own, thus creating a circle of "people like us" in which she felt more comfortable.

Ms. Ying, a returned migrant who is young and full of vitality, always depicts herself as a person who "loves to have fun." She loves the energy-filled lifestyle of Hong Kong, and going out after work with friends is one of the things she enjoys most. In her view, Hong Kong is a place brimming with entertainment. She hopes that all young people have the opportunity to return and have a look at Hong Kong and to experience for themselves the Hong Kong feeling of "fun."

Hong Kong is an amazing place for entertainment and fun; it is in fact a place that is dominated by Chinese culture, and it has a much unified city consciousness. Having left, returned to and seen Hong Kong from the perspective of an outsider, Ms. Ying has the following hopes for Hong Kong:

Actually, Hong Kong is more than Hongkongers, for there are also many from Africa and India and many Westerners as well. The government should do more to advertise social awareness of our diversity, advocate the pluralism of ethnicities in our society. Proprietors should open up their minds, become a bit more international and avoid being overly traditional. In doing business, they should pay attention to universal cultural differences.

Hong Kong is her home, and yet it is not like a home. Will she still be in Hong Kong in the future? For Ms. Ying, this is a question that has no firm answer:

I might use the word "nomad" to describe myself, traveling and experiencing life in different places. This is how I would describe myself, as I don't see myself taking root here. One day, if I should retire, would I retire in Hong Kong? Possibly. But then again I might go to some other place; I still don't know.

#### Biographical Profile 4: Daisy

Age: 43

Current position: Architect

Education level: Master's degree

Year of Migration: 1979 (at age 16)

Migration Destination: England

Year of Return to Hong Kong: 1992 (at age 29)

Marital Status: Divorced

Religion: None

Daisy is the youngest in her family. At the age of 16, because many in her family had immigrated to London, she quite naturally followed in their footsteps and undertook the last year of middle school in England, where she also took her undergraduate major and her Master degree in architecture. After graduation she worked as an architect in one of London's major construction companies.

Daisy felt that London was a perfectly cosmopolitan city. There were very few "pure" English people living in the city, which was rather more like "a gathering of foreigners." Such a metropolis of mingling ethnicities, where the majority come from other places, hastens the realization of understanding between different nationalities and cultures:

London is a place inhabited by many foreigners living together, and hardly anyone would ever think in terms of where they've come from. Everyone puts emphasis on mutual understanding in the workplace, with very few markers of where you're from. When I was living in London, we ordinarily would have frequent get-togethers, and everyone I knew didn't place much emphasis on what country they came from. Some of my friends were Italian and some were from Brazil, there were people from all over the world, but they seldom took pains to be with others from their own country. They had local friends and friends from their own country for sure, but they wouldn't necessarily take the trouble to seek them out. Since each person's background was quite different, whenever everyone met each other it was very interesting. For example, if a friend invited people home for a meal, a Polish colleague would specially bring along a Polish sauce, and Italian friends would bring along something they had prepared themselves. Every time we would go to a different friend's place for dinner, everyone would bring along something special from their home country to treat us, so I could never forget about my own background, and would keep it in my memory,

because in London everyone is different, and everyone would engage in mutual exchange. We wouldn't talk about our differences all the time, emphasizing where we came from.

Daisy feels that through 13 years of life in England, Chinese concepts and Western ways of thinking coexist for her and have a marked effect on her personally:

I think my Chinese conceptions are deep, but I have also been greatly influenced by Western ways of thinking. I really did merge myself into life over there. I had good friends from all over the world—Brazil, Poland, Italy, France, England, with no single category focus, as basically everybody who goes to work in London is psychologically prepared to mix and mingle with people of many different kinds, and otherwise they wouldn't have gone to London. Since you've gone there, and there are so many people from foreign lands there, you would have anticipated linking up with a lot of them. We discussed more about personalities than about where we came from.

When living in England, Daisy felt that her emotional identity was comfortable and stable. But in 1992, the English economy went into a great decline, and although the company where she was employed was large, with 300 people in the London branch alone, a few people were laid off every week, and the others had to face an economic environment that was too horrible to face. Daisy felt very unhappy at the everyday spectacle of people close to her facing the pain of unemployment. As it happened, she had the opportunity to go on a trip back to Hong Kong, and she witnessed the onset of the flourishing of Hong Kong's economy, with markets enjoying healthy growth and signs of prosperity everywhere. So she felt that maybe this was the right time to come back to work in Hong Kong.

Returning to Hong Kong where she had already lived for 16 years, Daisy at first thought it was just like "coming home," but in fact this city she thought she knew so well had already changed a lot:

Thinking back on it all, you could say that I came back ill-prepared. At the time, I looked upon it as returning home, which was not something to worry about, since I just needed to come back. But actually I was not prepared well, because my return was a culture shock. This shock had a huge influence on me, as it never occurred to me that Hong Kong could be like



this. If you were going to go to England now, you would be well prepared, because you would have already been prepared to meet new friends, going to a new place, but I had made no such psychological preparation for my return to Hong Kong, because it was homecoming, but in fact the changes that had taken place here were enormous, just enormous! After my return I felt ill-adapted, and after a year had passed, I felt I was out of place. I thought about leaving right away, but then again I also thought to myself, "Why not give living here a try?"

Daisy felt she could blend into local life quickly, but coming from London back to Hong Kong it seemed like she was facing greater adjustment difficulties than she had ever experienced before. Particularly in the workplace, coming from internationalized London back to a Hong Kong that was also flaunted as internationalized, Daisy felt the huge differences between the two places:

The attitude towards work here in Hong Kong, the mode of working, is very different from England. There is no free space here, and personal connections here are so important. Social connections are not so important in England; they have their conflicts and struggles, but they are pretty well limited to senior management. Working people in general, regardless of whether they are senior or junior, get along quite well at work and are really quite earnest at what they do. Everyone wants to do a good job, and won't haggle over themselves not getting enough credit or having put out a little more effort than others—their spirit of cooperation is strong. But Hong Kong is different, with a much weaker spirit of cooperation, something I can feel even today: many people not really wanting to cooperate with you. I think such people are rather selfish, concerned with nothing but their own work. People here have a much stronger zeal for their own personal causes, so much so that many will concentrate their efforts on arranging for their own career advancement rather than doing their best in their job. For me, this was a huge culture shock.

The workplace is a major source of social interaction. Faced with the problems of complex interpersonal relationships in Hong Kong companies, and with the fondness of her local colleagues for gossiping about others behind their backs, Daisy made up her mind to leave these companies that made it impossible for her to concentrate on work:

I think it's right that I should persist in my way of doing things, but of course I find this to be problematic. Perhaps my attitude towards work is

insistent, but then precisely because I am insistent, I have established a space of my own, a place where I can put things into practice by myself alone.

Four years elapsed between the time of her return to Hong Kong and when she became a boss. Daisy may be said to be a professional, a career woman, but starting her own enterprise was not the rose garden she had blueprinted for herself. The professional training that she had received in the West gave Daisy the freedom to choose. But in an architectural design field led by men, it is not at all easy for a woman to make good. Discrimination, setbacks and disappointments are tormenting but they are also character-toughening. For Daisy, "a determined mindset" is a torch in the heart:

I didn't want to fail. If you can't find a way to establish yourself, you will easily succumb to drifting with the flow, to doing whatever others do, because you will have lost yourself. When no one in Hong Kong identifies you as a particular entity, if you're not careful you will sink into merely following the group, chiming in with everyone else. I guess it was precisely for this reason that for the first while I really insisted on my own way of doing things.

The dialectic between the individual and society lies in this drama: people on the one hand are under the control of society, but on the other hand they are also redesigning society. For returning specialists like Daisy, the professional knowledge offered by Western countries is a form of social and cultural capital with long-term value—the tracks engraved in her by her immigrant life experiences are obvious. Daisy manifests a toughness and resilience unique to an immigrant:

My company has been established for 10 years. Over the past year I've come up with a new way of thinking. It's not that I have completely changed my outlook, but since we feel that we've now established our "status," I think we can change, and we don't have to go on "persisting." When I say we don't have to go on persisting, I don't mean that we can abandon the things we are carrying out right now, rather I think we can blend in with Hong Kong, merge with them and learn why they think the way they do. We can begin to merge into their midst and work with them. I dare not say we can change them, but we won't engage them confrontationally as we are



already merging into their midst. I think it is right that we should merge with them, because only by so doing can we make even greater contributions, so I now take part in several governmental public offices, such as in certain committees, because I want to rejoin society now. I backed out of society before, because we wanted to persist in establishing our own enterprise, otherwise we wouldn't be able to get anything done. Today, since we have several accomplishments to our credit and since others know who we are, we can now merge in with the others as we now have earned a status and a place in society. I think this is the way we should go now, gradually merging into society. This is our thinking over the past year. We must have established something ourselves before we can practice our livelihood together with them. This is the only way we can let them know how our things are different from theirs. This is a very special personal transformation! We feel that the process is a very special one.

In an age of fluidity, with all the coming and going, leaving and returning, coming back to Hong Kong is not without some shedding of tears, but one must change to pursue a better life. Hope, seek, wait and change. The Hong Kong returnees' stories are hardly ever written by individuals themselves. Nearby others and the whole of society all take part in the outlining and sketching of the scene. The imaginative power of sociology tells us that only by placing an individual in a specific social position at a given time we can comprehend the significance of the individual's intrinsic life and extrinsic livelihood. Consequently, Daisy has the following hope regarding the Hong Kong government: "I would suggest that government be not so stern, and draw upon a few more enlightened minds. I think the returnees actually can contribute very much space for deep, creative thought. A society needs balance, and different types of people are needed by society. If a society cannot achieve balance in this respect, then it will certainly have to pay a price for that inability".

### **Conflict between Movers and Stayers**

Also widespread is the conflict between movers and stayers, which is often inter-generational. Young sons and daughters who have returned to

Hong Kong realize they have changed, so have their parents, and others of their parents' generation who stayed behind. This also occurs within generations—with former friends, peers, and schoolmates. Returnees are frequently treated by locals as "different," and they oscillate between the familiarity of home and the all-strangeness of the West:

Since my return, I've had some conflicts with my parents. I used to have a lot of freedom when I was in Australia. Now I'm back, my parents take the same approach they used in my pre-Australia days to discipline me. When I go out in the evening, they'll call me and check when I will reach home and say they'll keep a vigil for me. When we don't think alike, conflicts arise. Sometimes, I like to be alone in my room to enjoy some personal space. My parents resent this as they feel that I do not give them any attention. This is not the case as all I want is to wind down and relax; however, they regard this as indifference towards them. I don't know how to explain this; I can't explain. I resort to leaving the door open, so they'll know what I'm doing in my room. They are conservative. The conflicts with my parents bother me a lot because I don't expect to spend energy to deal with conflicts after a hard day's work. (Case 20)

My ex-schoolmates consider that I'm superior to them since I have been exposed to Western culture. They may be putting themselves down for the wrong reason. I find that tertiary education may not determine who is superior. They, however, focus very much on money. When we meet, there seems to be a gap; I find it hard to click with them. Work experience might have influenced my friends to be materialistic...I ask myself whether they are too snobbish in making certain remarks. Why are they like that? I don't see eye to eye with them. However, to maintain our relationship, we need to accommodate each other. Although I disagree with them on some issues, I keep them all to myself. I won't speak about my disagreement. (Case 22)

Three unintended consequences of the journey back home of our returnees can be articulated. First, there is a sense that returnees have become homeless, they are at the margin of the two worlds of the locals and the non-locals; the returnees desire to belong to both worlds, but are accepted by neither:

I do feel being marginalized. In the job I'm holding now, people regard me as a member of the camp of the American colleagues. They simply do not identify me as a Hongkonger. However, when I am in the midst of the Americans, they consider

me a foreigner. That makes me feel deeply ambivalent... I feel tragic being a Hongkonger sometimes, as I don't know where my roots are. What do I get from this painful experience? (Case 22)

The most uncomfortable thing is when you react differently to some daily life issues, people would say, "damned barbarian, go back to Canada!" What can I do about this situation? I have also been sworn at: "Go back to China!" Even when I travel with a Canadian passport, some people may wonder why a yellow-faced Chinese is holding a Canadian passport. They may ask, "Who are you?" (Case 9)

The second unintended consequence of return is that the returnees have begun to engender in themselves a sense of hybridity, complete with both its upside and its downside. The upside is that of creativity and innovativeness of the returnees because, to them, what is done in one way by the locals can be done in another way according to the returnees; returnees fully understand the artificiality of things, all of which can be debunked, deconstructed and reconstructed. This insight is their genius, their creativity, their source of delight. The downside, or even dark side, of hybridity is that cultural hybrids are distrusted by both insiders (locals) and outsiders (expatriates), thus forcing some of them to hide their hybridity, to practice passing as people who they are not, which often entails considerable emotional costs:

Internal conflict arises strongly and mostly from work situations: for example, during a meeting with the attendance of both Chinese and Westerners. When the meeting members get into disagreement which results in some gray areas—with no absolute black or white—I feel the conflict. In those moments, I may take the position of the Chinese party; I may also take the position of the Western party. When asked about my opinion, I feel too perplexed and confused to take sides. (Case 19)

What is the dark side of "hybridity"? It may involve ambiguities—you find it hard to build work focus. You may swing your thoughts from one side to the other. You may base your decisions on one side this time, but you may favor the other side another time. Sometimes, it is confusing with no direction. I am like a pendulum. (Case 6)

The third unintended consequence of return is a result of the foregoing two conditions being compounded: the returnees as "cultural misfits" may drift even further and move overseas yet one more time, a condition we call "circuit migration." Mobility, whether physical, emotional or

intellectual, has thus become an existential condition as far as the migrant is concerned. In between feeling homely and unhomely, the returnee is now a stranger in his own home, or worse, he may become a stranger to himself, inflicted by a sense of self-estrangement:

You pay a price for emotional adaptation when you practice the multicultural approach. If I were a 100% Hongkonger, I would have an easier time. If I could accept the values of my colleagues who behave like the characters in *Gum Chi Yuk Yip* (a popular 2006 Hong Kong television drama serial about power struggle) I might feel more comfortable. Since I can't accept my colleagues' values, I have to fight against these values. I need to get used to this challenge. Some may achieve this more easily by taking a shortcut. For me, it takes a longer process to reach my goals. When I can't accept certain behaviors, I feel an emotional turmoil, which causes me to become moody... When I'm in this situation, I feel lonely and I miss my family in the States. I wish I could be with them in the States. Sometimes, I truly wish to have more friends who would share my views. On such occasions, I identify myself as a New Yorker as most New Yorkers are like me with an immigrant status but without a distinct identity. We are all marginalized. (Case 10)

Our returnees "fall between two stools," having experienced double ruptures of their social networks, first during their departure from Hong Kong years ago, then upon bidding farewell to the West; such dual uprootedness makes their return adaptation stressful. They are living on a line where the past is cut off and the future is unknown.

They have found themselves in a condition of alienation in Hong Kong, objectively (structurally) and subjectively (psycho-socially), of loss or demise of community, of a sense of "dis-community," with little or no participation in civil society, professional/occupational/trade organizations or societies. The returnees have broken or diminished ties with old friends, schoolmates from primary and secondary schools and university left behind in Hong Kong; the locals have all changed, so have the returnees themselves: "you don't step into the same river twice." Their social fabric has been torn and split. Now back in Hong Kong, the returnees find themselves socially and emotionally dependent on ties and networks left behind in the West. On the positive side, this is a sign of

transnationalism, of a two-legged existence, one leg in Hong Kong, the other leg still in the West. But this is also a paradoxical existence. Their dependency on the second leg prevents them from a full participation in Hong Kong society:

Yes, I sometimes feel marginalized, a feeling of isolation. At times, you would like to network with one side but find little rapport; you would like to network with the other side but you feel alienated. In the end, you feel disconnected from both sides. I mentioned to you earlier that I had returned to Canada; however, I did not stay on. I eventually came back to Hong Kong. When I decided to return to Canada, I experienced the feeling of disconnection. When I was in Canada, I wondered if I could re-adapt with my network of friends since I had left. The feeling of disconnection was caused by my association with the Hong Kong living experience and the mindset there. Alienation is painful, very hard to describe. (Case 6)

Leaving Canada to return to Hong Kong is like emigrating a second time. I wouldn't know if I should describe myself as a "return migrant" or a "second-time emigrant." When I compare my impression of Hong Kong, as it is now or as it was four to five years ago, to my impression of the Hong Kong that I knew when I grew up, I realize that things have changed. For example, I've lost contact with a lot of my old friends. Our differences are many! I had been away for ten years. If I were to share my ten years' overseas experience with those who have no overseas living experience, they wouldn't understand me. Even if they could understand me, they wouldn't be able to empathize with my feelings. There's a gap. About my new friends, the majority of them have no experience of migrating overseas or of living away from a place for long. A lot of them studied for a few years overseas; that experience is not the same as migrating. A real emigrant is the one who cuts his roots from his homeland. Therefore, I find it hard to communicate in many respects. I feel like I'm in a new place. It's a funny feeling because the perceived new place brings back some memories of familiarity, while other elements of the reality are so different from the past perception. The situation is ambiguous. (Case 9)

Having been in the West and now back in the East, the returnees have earned their hybridity, their cultural doubleness. This hybridity offers moments of delight, and could be a positive force. Returnees command competencies in both cultures, and they possess local knowledge in both places—they get the best of both worlds. Extended cultural horizons often make returnees more

socially intelligent, more able to understand complexities because they themselves are complex. They can harness some of the conflict they feel each day. Hybridity is the returnees' asset:

Reflecting on my life and experience overseas, I realized that I was able to have a broader perspective. It's like seeing yourself in the mirror, a mirror that offers you more angles to observe and analyze. I would consider that an advantage. (Case 9)

I studied overseas and had the opportunity of traveling to different countries. Compared with the locals or with those who live only in the States, I may be more global in my exposure as I have diversified experience...I have interacted with people of different cultural backgrounds. My academic major also allowed me to broaden my horizons. Moreover, I am more open-minded. I can't say I'm more creative than others; but I do think that I have an advantage. With a broad cultural perspective, I find it easy to work with foreigners. I may also relate to the knowledge in books and current affairs with deeper insight. (Case 7)

I consider myself a global person. A global person is open-minded, does not stick to a certain culture. A typically traditional Chinese person sticks to a cultural pattern. A global person, however, integrates the advantages of different cultures...I am amazed by different cultures to which I keep an open mind. Even though I have not lived in a certain place, I will not form any prejudice against it. (Case 16)

But hybridity has a dark side. If the returnees are not in a position of power, their hard-won creativity can be shackled. Managers identify difference and stigmatize it, close it down, eliminate it. Their difference has become a stigma, a spoiled identity, something being relentlessly marked out by the locals for differential treatment. So what do stigmatized returnees do? Some of them hide themselves. They try to pass as stayers, but often not successfully. They form hybrid ghetto communities, they swap jobs often, or they move on:

I find myself quite creative. However, Hong-Kongers do not appreciate this as they are conservative. Although I'm working in an American company, the working culture is not American at all. The company follows the Chinese culture. Chinese have a bad habit, they believe in this: you err more when you put in more work; you err less when you put in less work; you don't err at all when you don't work! If your boss feels that you are smarter than she is, she will suppress you. She won't give you opportunities for advancement. Chinese are selfish. (Case 20)

What's the dark side of hybridity? Often others do not understand your practice. They don't see that your bottom line is under the influence of two cultures. Obviously, you need to manage issues that are ambiguous to both cultures, with no knowledge of what causes the ambiguities. These are usually work issues...Not only do you need to be creative, but you also need to be creative in the Hong Kong context; for example, dealing with the changes and restructuring at the university. On the one hand, you would like to speak with conviction to express your views; on the other hand, you need to consider the Chinese way of preserving harmony. You're caught between speaking up in the Western way and keeping to the Chinese cultural behavior. "Hybridity" allows you to have a broad perspective; but it prevents you from being understood, thus causing inner pain. (Case 4)

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### Adjusting to Local Social Values

The returnees' "re-socialization" in the West engendered in them certain values and beliefs that are typical of modernity: meritocracy, gender equality, democracy, out-spokenness, and open-mindedness, being critical of authority, transparency, creativity and innovativeness, among others—which to them are the "good things" in life that underpin "a good society." They have been transformed by their sojourns in the West—in a way, they have become better people: more modern, more open, more communicative, more democratic, more liberal-minded and more cosmopolitan. Yet Hong Kong society has also changed; it is retaining, if not further strengthening or deepening, much of its Chinese character in terms of a solidified vertical hierarchy, lack of transparency, conservatism, authoritarianism, over-emphasis on "guanxi," prejudice toward and intolerance of the "unfamiliar others," such as racial and ethnic minorities. As Hong Kong has slowly gone through a process of "re-sinification" since its handover to China in 1997, the returnees have suffered acutely from a "reverse culture shock":

I worked as an editor for a Chinese newspaper in my first job in Hong Kong. My first boss scolded me on my first day of work. His officious behavior might have to do with his being Chinese. I wouldn't accept this management style; I chose to confront him. (Case 9)

I think that Hongkongers tend to follow a *laissez-faire* style in management, disorganized, ad hoc without any system. Even when things are done in an inefficient manner, they just carry on. (Case 10)

Chinese-owned companies are not very transparent. The bosses usually have their pre-conceptions in setting policies or in discussing issues. Meetings that are meant for consulting your opinion are just for show. Most bosses simply do not comply with the policies nor do they follow work procedures set by the company. However, in American or British companies, you have a limit to your authority regardless of your position. You need to follow the rules and regulations. The Chinese-owned companies do not have such a practice. (Case 17)

I aspired to fly high in my career when I returned. I was ready to achieve better career development, bringing with me my experience of having studied and worked in Australia. The reality is disappointing...My manager is very rank-conscious. He feels that he has to play his role as a senior to instruct me in my work. This is so different from the management style in Australian companies. My Australian managers regard me as their peer. They would approach me and ask me to enlighten them. Hong Kong managers do not practice this approach. My manager always wants to suppress my performance. He can also be moody. I wanted to apply the Australian management style in Hong Kong; but it's not applicable...In Australia the management values teamwork and communication. They respect your thinking because they do not believe that seniority in rank or in years of service means better work performance. Perhaps only Chinese societies dismiss the opinions of new employees. (Case 20)

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### Conflicts and Problems at Work

The occupational experiences of the returnees varied, showing a close relationship between personal fortunes and larger structural forces. Returnees who were in accounting, banking and financial services before and after return to Hong Kong fared rather well. So did those who worked in transnational or foreign companies or organizations (e.g., embassies or consulates) that had close links with their countries of immigration in the West, because they had foreign experience and competence in the English language. Other returnees in the field of education had found better and more job opportunities and enjoyed higher salaries in Hong Kong than before. Those who



ventured into self-employment and entrepreneurship found Hong Kong a good site for global trade and business. Those in machines, technology and engineering faced the prospect of work dislocation or mismatch between skills supplied and demand in the market, being forced into part-time employment, job-hopping or even unemployment. Returnees in the IT industry followed the sector's ebb and flow:

At first, I found it incredible that I couldn't get a job! I had never thought of being caught in this situation. I'm experienced in operating some advanced technology; I'm also well versed with engineering. How could I accept receiving no response to my many application letters? I started to doubt my ability; I then considered switching my career. If I abandoned engineering, what could I pursue? I contemplated entering finance because I'm pretty good at maths; therefore, the choice was logical. I tried looking for a job as financial analyst in order to make a living. Unfortunately, the economy was bad in 2004. My getting a job even in finance was in vain. I was totally demoralized. My boyfriend was in the States. Our plan was for me to find a job in Hong Kong first. He would then follow me here. As I continued to be jobless, the two of us started to quarrel. He wanted me to go back to the States; but I didn't want to. That was the toughest time for us. In fact, my adaptation to Hong Kong life had not been smooth. I went back to the States a few times; but I didn't feel happy a single time. I was without a job. My boyfriend showed no empathy for me. He's a foreigner growing up in the Western world with no Hong Kong experience. There's no way he could understand my struggle to adapt to my family, friends and culture. He believed that one could live anywhere; he didn't agree to my choice of staying in Hong Kong. Therefore, I always ended up quarrelling with him when I saw him in the States. I also didn't have other friends there. (Case 10)

Despite their English language advantage, those in the culture industry, e.g., journalism and communications, had to cope with an economy that continued to require competency in the written and spoken Chinese language:

When I spoke in Cantonese, my boss commented that I was speaking Indian. My friends also said that I had an accent; I didn't think so. I truly didn't feel anything wrong with my Cantonese...I asked myself what to do! I felt lost as I couldn't catch some English words or sentences of the locals at times; my Chinese was perceived as Indian! When I first returned, I felt scared...In fact, language is often a matter of confidence or lack of it. Initially,

I couldn't relate to my Chinese or my foreign identity. I lacked self-confidence, even before starting work. (Case 36)

My greatest regret is that I don't know much written Chinese. Not being able to read Chinese deprives me of the opportunities to read all kinds of Chinese newspapers. Even when I try reading, I don't understand much. I'm pretty alright with speaking and listening; however, I'm truly lost in reading. It was such a pity. I left Hong Kong when I was very young. I was obliged to pick up English quickly in the foreign country. As I didn't speak a single word of English at the time, I lost no time learning the language. English was my priority. Besides English, I learnt French, German, and Latin to follow the system. I didn't learn any Chinese at all. (Case 14)

In comparison with those who grew up here, I think I have lost my proficiency in Chinese. My Chinese is not as good. In the midst of other Chinese, I have little chance to speak. Their ability to articulate in Chinese is amazing. I fully understand what they say. However, when you ask me to express my thoughts in Chinese, I find it hard. At work, I can't function without a good vocabulary. If you are perfectly bilingual, you're superior in your performance. I can read Chinese, but only to a certain extent. My English is slightly better than the English spoken by the local people. However, my slight advantage in English doesn't seem to apply when I compare myself to those from the mainland. (Case 1)

The disjuncture between the returnees and Hong Kong society is most apparent in the workplace: returnees experience conflicts with their bosses and their colleagues—they have become “cultural misfits.” They are oddballs, outsiders, or as one interviewee put it, “outliers” located in either of the two tails of a normal distribution, not normal, not usual, kind of deviant, if not rebellious. However hard the returnees attempt to integrate themselves into Hong Kong society and its workplaces, others draw visible and invisible lines between them and others, a condition worsened by their “non-native” ways of speaking Cantonese, their incompetence in the written Chinese language, their lack of local knowledge, their social inappropriateness, their awkwardness. They are frustrated by not being able to understand the jokes of the locals. They feel most stressed when spending informal time with locals over tea, meals, in parties, at picnics. They dread such social occasions, which dramatically remind them of their outsider status, their marginality:

I do sense discrimination by the locals. I may seem like a novelty to them, not part of them because I'm a "little barbarian girl"....After a while, I realized to some degree I couldn't relate to them. I didn't feel any intimacy...The gap does exist as I do feel the prejudice from my local colleagues. When you face prejudice, you need to cope with the situation skillfully. You'll need to read the situation carefully and respond appropriately. I feel that they may be testing me. They want to test me and see if I give the right response and adopt the right position as a foreigner. (Case 21)

Overseas graduates like us and the locals simply can't mix. I find it strange and incomprehensible why we can't mix with each other. Even when you try to strike a conversation with them, they may not respond. They show a lot of reluctance...They probably have some form of discrimination against the overseas graduates. In the beginning, we invited them to meals; but we gradually knew that the local colleagues really wanted to keep a distance from us. They found it hard to click with us as they might have thought that we had a sense of superiority. They gradually didn't want to speak to us. This group of people comprised junior staff members. As they made up the majority of the staff, they had a lot of influence sometimes. When we became closer to the senior management, two parties were formed. We are not sure about the reason for the lack of rapport between the two parties. Cultural differences or rank differences? (Case 22)

Returnees push for democratization, equality, open communication, transparency, meritocracy, open resolution of conflicts, creativity and innovativeness, accountability—all of which ask deep, fundamental questions about the status quo, the taken-for-granted, and the prevailing power structure. Both knowingly and unknowingly they pose a threat to those in power, creating moment after moment of jealousy, interpersonal tension and conflicts. The non-conformists must be eliminated because they are rivals in the eyes of the powerful. This is an instance of the returnees' "lack of fit" between self and society (family, work organization and society). The returnees drift from one job into another; and when they do that, they can be accused by locals of job-hopping, of not being loyal, not being faithful:

In the States, I could consult others when I was unsure about certain work issues. It's different here. I once tried to seek the opinion of a colleague, who did his PhD here; he implied in his response that I meant to challenge him. My intention to seek

his opinion was indeed genuine. At last, I told him I truly didn't know the answer and I was sincere in asking him. He still didn't feel comfortable. Such a situation would never happen in the States. I felt uneasy as I didn't know how to work with him. (Case 10)

In fact, it took some adjustment to work with my boss. He has worked there for a long time. However, his academic qualifications are not as high as mine; he also does not have experience living in Canada. I need to keep a low profile. I remind myself to slow down sometimes by refraining from exerting my level of competence...He may regard my consulting him as a threat. (Case 5)

Here in Hong Kong, teamwork is but a slogan. It doesn't happen in reality. My first job was as a regular reporter for a finance company. Nobody told me what I should do. My department head wasn't sure of his role. When I approached him for help, he appeared uncomfortable. He might think that I meant to challenge him. (Case 18)

Some of the returnees have experienced job dislocation in Hong Kong. Having broadened their job skills and experiences in the West, they have learned to their dismay that the Hong Kong economy and market is rather singular or one-dimensional in nature, certainly not diversified or pluralistic enough to accommodate those who are not in the business and banking sector. The dislocated returnees include those in fields such as the arts, design and culture. The work careers of some of the returnees have been interrupted, injured or even broken up. Return migration causes work discontinuity and disruption, even underemployment and unemployment, the deleterious consequences of which are rather well known in the sociological literature on work:

When I returned in 2003, it was difficult to get a job. It was really hard. I first worked as an engineer in a semi-conductor manufacturing company in Tsuen Wan. During my three months' employment, I realized there were many problems in that company—long working hours, low pay, tiring work with no prospects for advancement. Therefore, I resigned...Further efforts to find an engineering-related job were in vain. (Case 10)

Hong Kong is an achieving society par excellence, stressing things such as material success, accumulation of wealth and capital, hard work, long working hours. Material success has long been a cardinal value amongst Hongkongers,



suppressing alternative values such as spending quality time with children and family; the capacity for esthetic, artistic and cultural pursuits; leisure and its regenerative functions; and charity, philanthropy and care for the unfortunate and the disabled. The returnees were very quickly “re-socialized” into the dominant ethos, but lamented the lack of time after work for some of the things they used to enjoy doing in the West. Work is so hard and so long in Hong Kong that there is very little time left for anything else, not even sleep. Other than work, there is nothing, which further fortifies the isolation of the returnees from their community, neighborhood and society. They feel lonely, detached, alienated after work, outside work, during weekends and long holidays:

It’s exhausting to work here—that’s what I find the hardest to adjust to. It’s so different from the life in England. In Hong Kong, work always comes first; personal life comes second. Your employers not only demand extra work with no extra pay, but they also expect you to deliver fully. (Case 17)

Hong Kong is a society with resource constraints; therefore it is full of competition. The economic pressure imposed by society has probably deprived the elderly and the children of our care. This lack of care may also be due to the resource constraints. We attach little importance or show little alertness to certain values, which may be described as non-economic, spiritual, moral values. We are uncertain of our identity. (Case 14)

## An Uncanny Feeling: Home But Not Home

For most of our returnees, before their return to Hong Kong, they thought the journey is like a return to home. But the reality is so different. From our interviews, we realized that there is a sense that returnees have become marginalized and homeless.

What about the future? Four of our returnees had actually returned to Hong Kong twice, caught in a cycle of racism and dismay at the glass ceiling in the West, and the pull of Hong Kong, where they no longer feel at home. It’s likely that some of these people will be posted to mainland China in the future, taking with them local knowledge

of Hong Kong and some part of the West. Perhaps they could be seen as path-breakers, but they will probably just be displaced again. These returnees seem destined to be eternal drifters, which is reminiscent of observations in two classic sociological essays in the 1960s by Alfred Schutz: “The Stranger” and “The Homecomer.” Schultz pointed out that the return migrant has often become a stranger in his own home, in his birthplace. Homecoming is not such a heart-warming experience after all:

I know from the bottom of my heart that my roots are not in Hong Kong. To which place do I really feel a sense of belonging? I know that I grew up in England, but I don’t consider myself English. Having worked in Hong Kong for 10 years, I however do not find myself a 100% Hong Konger. I have a strange feeling: I don’t know to which side I belong. When you asked me about my identity, I didn’t know how I should answer. (Case 21)

I find that it’s not easy to detach myself when the psychological state is unstable; it is difficult to anchor myself to one place...For those who have lived in many places, isolation is a frequent experience...I also would like to know truly who I am. I can say that I am a Hongkonger, or a Canadian or I’m a human being. (Case 9)

A majority of the returnees were in mid-career, anxious to build, develop and consolidate their work prospects, particularly in view of the huge potential of the China economy. Work being their primary consideration, most of them will probably stay in Hong Kong for a long while. But the decision to stay will ultimately depend on how their careers fare. The men have stayed so far out of consideration for their own selves, with migration as a matter of personal achievement:

As far as my career is concerned, I’ll try to stay in Hong Kong as long as possible; the other issues will be secondary. To build my career, I’ll stay here. I’m 42. In consideration of the current economy and the development in the mainland, I believe that career prospects will be fine for the next 10 years. As there’s not much construction industry in Hong Kong now, we rely entirely on the service industry. Banking is the vital sector. I believe its prospects are still good. I hope that will be the case. (Case 19)

Fantasizing about a rosy, better future allowed the returnee to tolerate his suffering, and enabled him to make the present more bearable.

A certain portion of our returnees, especially the women, were very anxious to leave Hong Kong, but these feelings were not translated into action. For them, to leave or not to leave Hong Kong depended largely on the career development of their husbands, and on the wellbeing of their parents and other family members. They made self-sacrifices, in the name and for the sake of the family. To the female returnees, migration was a “family affair”:

I have to struggle a bit. Since my family and my boyfriend were here then, I didn't have much choice. The feeling of having no choice has lasted for a long time. It still exists now. If I could leave now, I would. I've no worries about going back to New Zealand to find a job because I've many years of work experience there. Besides, I did my studies there; being considered for employment should not be a problem. However, my contribution may not count as much as in Hong Kong. After all, my career growth has not been as significant as my husband's. He's now doing better and better. The same level of growth is more difficult in New Zealand. He's staying here because of his career. I'm not leaving because of my husband. (Case 22)

I plan to return to New Zealand...If possible, I would like to retire at forty. Whether I can do this depends on whether my husband and my parents will be around. I would have to deliver on all my commitments here before I could leave. At that time, I might be tied down by my commitments to other family members. It's not that easy to leave Hong Kong behind. However, my heart left long ago. Honestly, my desire to leave has been around since the day I arrived here. I don't like it here. (Case 12)

For the returnees, Hong Kong is a place to work, to make plenty of money quickly, not a place to live, enjoy family life or retire in. The majority were certain that they would not spend the last years of their lives in Hong Kong, finding the place too expensive, too polluted, too crowded. Where would they retire then? Where they once emigrated to, the Western world, for two main reasons: better medical service and social welfare, and still having family and other networks there to provide social and emotional support:

I returned to Hong Kong in 1993. I had taught at Shu Yan College before my departure to Canada. Why did I return to Hong Kong? You may say that opportunities are not as good in Canada. It's not

easy to find teaching jobs there...My plan is to go back to Canada because of my parents. I need to take care of my parents. Moreover, I can enjoy the Canadian lifestyle. (Case 2)

Ever since my return to Hong Kong, I've identified myself as a Hongkonger. However, I'll go back to Australia. My nationality is Australian as I hold Australian citizenship...About my future, I plan to work here for three to four more years before going back to Australia. I hope to get married in Hong Kong in the next few years. My parents are aware of my desire to go back to Australia. They support my plan very well as they would like me to apply for their migration to Australia once I get back there. (Case 20)

In the minds of the returnees, Hong Kong is not a place to enjoy life, but a place to do hard work. Rationalized as such, suffering at work is understandable and temporarily tolerable because working now is an investment in a future of leisure and pleasure in the West.

Having worked and lived elsewhere, the returnees have expanded their intellectual and cultural horizons, improved their adaptational abilities, and enhanced their professional knowledge and competencies. They have achieved a sort of inner mobility, a natural propensity to adapt, adjust and self-transform, a wanderer's or adventurer's personality. To them, the future is provisional, tentative, experimental, non-committal, a kind of “wait and see.” They have a Taoist outlook, in which life will take its natural course, emerging tentatively:

Will I continue to stay in Hong Kong? I honestly don't know. I'm a mobile person. I have many activities in Hong Kong. My next destination will have to do with a few factors: my direction, my future, my preferred lifestyle or a place to which I could contribute. My options include England, the mainland, or Hong Kong. I could also consider going to a totally new place which values my contribution. Therefore, it's not important where I end up in. I follow the Taoist thinking, taking the natural course. I may be able to build on something that drives me to another place, just go along. There's no need to plan too hard. (Case 15)

The returnees are asking, where is my next stop? Which station will I get on, and off, and then on again? Their answer is simple: I don't know. I don't need to know. Life itself, and the future, is one big unknown, which makes life intriguing, indeed challenging.

## Conclusion

Clearly, if sometimes only temporarily, Hong Kong was a desirable place to work, but many returnees soon found that they did not “fit.”

Most of the returnees described a quiet process by which their work colleagues, and sometimes their own family members, removed them from consideration as true locals who know how Hong Kong works, and should work. They were torn between their Chinese, Hongkonger selves and the Western personas that other people insisted on giving them, and which they sometimes gave themselves. These “half-Chinese, half-foreigners,” as they were often called, found the innovativeness and creativity they had necessarily developed during their sojourns overseas ignored, or even worse, distrusted—made suspect. Although they had much to contribute, to both the workplace and, by extension, society, they had few, if any, ways of actually doing so.

Major re-adjustment difficulties encountered were in the work place—largely in terms of a yawning gap in work and management culture between Hong Kong and the West. The manifest values of Hong Kong’s local work culture articulate meritocracy, equality, transparency and accountability, while the latent practices, which caught many returnees by surprise, were premised on authoritarianism, hierarchy, conformity and discrimination. Though held up as ideals, creativity and innovativeness were merely paid lip service, overlooked, punished or eliminated because they posed a threat to the status quo and to those in power. Meanwhile, the returnees as “outsiders” and the locals entered into conflicts and struggles; still other returnees experienced disjunctures between their job skills and market demands. On the social level, returnees, as movers, experienced tensions with locals, as stayers, with the two parties separated by experiential and cultural differences. As a consequence, few returnees saw Hong Kong as a place to retire, while others honestly did not know where their futures lay—Hong Kong was a mere stop in their “circuit migration.”

Our study of the return migrants in Hong Kong as reported in this chapter throws up some deep, critical questions about the family, the Chinese family, Chineseness, being and doing Chinese, marriage, being sons and daughters, wives and husbands. The returnees have been elsewhere. While sojourning in societies in the west, they have both knowingly and unknowingly transformed themselves. In the context of the family and marriage, these transformations bear significantly on values and attitudes toward all things familial and Chinese, which have momentous consequences for relations within and outside the family and marriage, between self and others, family and work, private and public. Lesions and fault lines make their repeated appearances in just about each and every interpersonal transaction and encounter because the “elsewhere man and woman” no longer enjoy their former closeness of fit with the locals who have also changed not on their own volition. One does not step into the same river twice. The uncanny feeling of home but not homely, unhomely, continues. A moving family, or a family in motion, provides the existentialist philosopher and the methodologist, even the poet, an ideal occasion to meditate on the malleability of culture, social structure, world views, values, humanity. The pragmatist sociologist would work toward change for the better for himself or herself, and for all.

Return migration as a life transition which, like all transitions, is problematic and stressful, and requires re-adjustment and the mobilization of all available and accessible resources on the part of the return migrants. But coping and adaptation are no individual matters. A good sociologist would insist that individual experience is ultimately inseparable from the larger social circumstances that penetrate the lives of people like a cold sharp knife. Major human difficulties, such as the negative social treatment of difference, are not responsive to individual coping responses, however hard the person tries. The sociologist does not see imperfect individuals, but rather, imperfect social organizations. In the end, when the return migrant conforms, behaves ritualistically, retreats, innovates, rebels, not

merely because of inner forces or personality factors, but because social circumstances “call these forms of behavior out” and institutionalize them, for better or for worse. As another sociologist, Mills (1959), put it in his articulation of the sociological imagination, private troubles are often caused by public issues. The private must be taken care of by the public—thus the burden is on the government and society to spark off a public discourse about Hong Kong as an immigrant society, now.

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## A Double-Edged Sword: Mobility and Entrepreneurship

## 7

Chan Wai-wan

The twenty-first century is a highly mobile era. “Mobility” keeps enormous societal resources flowing locally and globally, whilst criss-crossing countless borders and boundaries (Urry 2000, p. 199). Living in such a typically mobile and invariably hybrid society (Urry 2000, p. 196), the individual’s activity is no longer confined to a specific societal structure as used to be the case in a rural society. On the contrary, the individual’s living space is in a constant state of flux. In our fully mobile era, an increasing number of cross-border migrants are emerging from our society. This large group of cross-border travellers shuttle between different territories. They are highly mobile travellers, just like the clerks and messengers who used to gallop to and fro between different courier posts in ancient China.

These characteristics of our era look even more remarkable when examined in economic and trading terms. Under globalisation, internationally operated businesses are becoming ever more common. Hong Kong is an international trading city whose success has been built on the economic principle of the maximisation of business profit. Since mainland China started its reform programme, including opening up to the outside world, more and more Hong Kong companies and individuals

are going north in search of business opportunity. Some companies have opened daughter companies on the mainland, while others have relocated their production departments there. Some individual employees have followed their companies and gone to work north of the border, while others plan to start their own businesses, profiting from the opening up of the mainland market. In particular, from the nineties onwards, finding work, starting a business and investing in mainland China have already become irreversible trends. In 2004 the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department published a report on Hong Kong residents working on the mainland of China. The survey covered the period from February to March 2004 and revealed that about 244,000 Hong Kong residents had worked on the Chinese mainland within the previous 12 months. Compared with similar surveys done between 2001 and 2003, the number of people going to work on the Chinese mainland increased steadily. Among those who work on the mainland, more than 15% are in the capacity of employer.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department: “Social Data Collected via the General Household Survey: Special Topics Report—Report No. 38.” The “Hong Kong residents living in Mainland China” therein does not only include those who travel to China only for the purpose of negotiating business, and/or attending trade exhibitions, conferences and business gatherings. Further, it does not include people engaged in transport between Hong Kong and mainland China and fishermen or seamen working in the seawaters of mainland China.

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The focus of this chapter is the group of migrants mentioned above. This group of people were born on the Chinese mainland, and then migrated from there to Hong Kong, and have now returned to the mainland to operate their businesses. They are a group of “immigrant entrepreneurs”, who often shuttle between three places—their place of birth (mainland home), a second place of residence and the location of business activity (a certain place on the mainland). “The word Immigrant” here has two layers of meaning in terms of definition. The first refers to the migration experience of these entrepreneurs themselves. The immigrant entrepreneurs in this chapter first have to have been born on the mainland or somewhere other than Hong Kong, and then to have migrated to Hong Kong. After residing in Hong Kong for a period of time, they have returned to the mainland to operate their businesses. Although these entrepreneurs work most of the time on the mainland, they have not moved out of Hong Kong. Their family—or their core family—is still in Hong Kong. The second layer is a kind of description of their present state of life. These entrepreneurs are not living in a fixed place and their business operations are not confined to one place. In accordance with the development needs of their business, they have to shuttle between different places. They may have to live in place A for a while, and then go to place B to inspect their business, and then go to visit their clients in place C. They live in a continuously mobile and fluid state.

The so-called entrepreneurs, the interviewees of my study reported in this chapter, mainly fulfil two major conditions: First, in respect of enterprise ownership, the entrepreneurs in my study have to be one of the shareholders of an enterprise, and the enterprise may be their own creation or a family business. Secondly, in respect of enterprise management, the entrepreneurs have to take part actively in the operation and management of the enterprise, and be more than simply an investor.

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## Informants’ Background

In total, 18 informants were interviewed, 16 of whom were immigrant entrepreneurs (see Table 7.1), the other two being family members.

Of these two, one was in charge of operating the entrepreneur’s business and served as a management representative.

Below I outline some of the characteristics our immigrant entrepreneurs displayed in terms of their business operations and personal backgrounds. As regards management, their businesses varied in size, with staff numbers ranging from a handful to more than four thousand. Most were small to medium enterprises, each having a crew of one or two hundred people. The nature of their business was just as varied, covering a spectrum of industries: construction materials, transportation fleets, real estate, textile factories, printing plants, garment factories, international trade, fruit and vegetable exports, glass manufacturing, petroleum products, etc. Fourteen out of the 16 businesses had two or more business locations, the most being seven. Nearly all (14 of 16) had Hong Kong offices. About half (7 of 16) had chosen to set up businesses in their place of origin, while the others were converged in Guangdong Province or in areas where the industry was concentrated.

Four features were identified from the personal backgrounds of our immigrant entrepreneurs. First, with regard to their place of origin, 11 out of the 16 were from Fujian Province (though from different cities, counties, or towns), and none of them knew each other before coming to Hong Kong. The others were from Xi’an in Shaanxi Province, Changchun in Jilin Province, Beijing, Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province, and Bandung, Indonesia. Second, in terms of gender, the majority of the immigrant entrepreneurs I approached were male. Of the 16 entrepreneurs, 13 were male and just three were female. Third, as regards age, my informants fell within a wide age range, between 31 and 63. Fourth, with regard to education level, seven had completed secondary school and the other nine held Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees. The older informants were generally found to have a lower education level than their younger counterparts. In addition, they arrived in Hong Kong over a period of time spanning more than 40 years. Some of them came to Hong Kong as early as 1958, while the latest arrived as late as 2000. Having lived through



**Table 7.1** Interviewees' personal information

Interviewees	Age	Education	Place of origin	Year of arrival	Business location(s)	Business nature (past and present)
1. Mr. Yee	38	University	Fuqing (Fujian)	1986	Shenzhen, Hebei, Zhuhai	Mixer truck fleets, intelligent networking, real estate
2. Mr. Chiu	36	University	Jinjiang (Fujian)	1986	Hong Kong and Zibo, Weifang, Qingdao of Shandong	Plush plants, chemical fibre plants, textiles factories, toy manufacturing, clothing, trades
3. Ms. Siu	43	Master's degree	Xi'an (Shaanxi)	1995	Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Xi'an	Electronic products, fruits trades, salons, health products franchisee
4. Mr. Kam	31	Master's degree	Shishi (Fujian)	1985	Hong Kong, Fujian	IT and Web design
5. Mr. Lok	35	Master's degree	Beijing	1985	Hong Kong, Shenzhen	Pest control services
6. Mr. Kei	34	University	Indonesia	1985	Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Indonesia	Electronic products trades
7. Mr. Shin	54	Junior High	Quanzhou (Fujian)	1961	Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Fujian	Plastic box manufacturing, 3D film material, laser imaging, laser labels, laser security packaging
8. Mr. Ngai	31	Master's Degree	Quanzhou (Fujian)	1989	Hong Kong, Fujian	Network services, fruits and vegetable exports
9. Mr. Kwok	36	Senior High	Jinjiang (Fujian)	1996	Shenzhen	Silk screen printing, pad printing, varnish spray, insulating material
10. Mr. Chuk	36	Senior High	Fuqing (Fujian)	1998	Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Wuhe, Bozhou, Shanghai, Yingtan, Jiujiang	Real estate, bowling centres
11. Mr. Wing	57	Senior High	Jinjiang (Fujian)	1961	Fujian, Tianjin	Printing plants, chemical plastics factories
12. Mr. Yue	62	Senior High	Nan'an (Fujian)	1958	Hong Kong, Dongguan	Printing plants
13. Ms. Lee	43	Senior High	Jilin (Changchun)	2000	Dongguan	Shoes-making
14. Mr. Yam	43	Master's degree	Ningde (Fujian)	1976	Hong Kong, Shenyang	Marketing, glass manufacturing
15. Mr. Chun	63	Senior High	Wenzhou (Zhejiang)	1958	Hong Kong, Guangzhou	Petroleum and petroleum products
16. Ms. Chai	31	Master's degree	Jinjiang (Fujian)	1989	Hong Kong, Fujian	Garment factories

different periods of Hong Kong's development, they have been witness to this city's history and have, with their substantive life experiences, painted it in the distinct hues of their times.

## Analysis of Interview Data and Reflection

### "Rationality" over "Emotionality"

"Immigrant entrepreneurs" are a very special mobile group. Their immigration experience is unique. Their mobile experience is still going on, unlike the immigrants described in various studies, who have only once put down new roots.

The government of Hong Kong has not conducted any kind of survey into how many immigrant entrepreneurs there are in Hong Kong. These immigrant entrepreneurs are at the forefront of the "mobile" society, but the current literature lacks in-depth studies about this group of people.

As well as approaching an entrepreneur and his managerial strategies from the perspective of the social structure of his time, I need also to move inside his heart, to the microcosmic world of his innermost feelings. In other words, as much as I need to develop an understanding of the larger social framework, I also have to look at the entrepreneur as a human being, with all the human characteristics that have been largely neglected in the existing literature.

Jean-Paul Sartre once remarked that "all human existence is a passion".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one of man's existential features is that he has "emotions", and so do entrepreneurs. One of the blind spots in the literature on entrepreneurship and business is its one-sided emphasis on the "business" dimension of a businessman, whereas his emotional needs and perplexities as a "man" are largely ignored. Current studies have scarcely mentioned the emotional worlds of business people, who are often portrayed as determined and

dauntless decision-makers. As we explore their managerial strategies and methods, and sing praises for their successes, it seems we must also take note of their human pains, frustrations, loneliness, fears and despair—and joy and delight.

In today's globalised competitive market and within its transnational business operation, a businessman needs to travel in and out of various interpersonal networks in order to operate, sustain and expand his businesses in different places. He can be aptly portrayed as having "one face, many masks"<sup>3</sup>. On different stages, he has to face different audiences, write different scripts, use different props, wear different masks and speak different languages. He is putting on a variety of shows, but at the same time he cannot leave the impression that he is a deceitful, insincere "actor", because in the Chinese tradition, actors are seen as "heartless people". Faced with people's misunderstandings and defence against him, he feels a lot of pressure and fear—pains that make up part of his daily routine. There is currently a vacuum in the research of these areas, because social sciences as a field of study is still too devoted to "science" and unable to rid itself of its excessive worship of "reason". Mainstream studies are mostly concentrated on the level of "rationality" while neglecting the elements of "emotionality": we study human "behaviour" but have often remained apathetic to human "feelings". We have "emotional" humans as our objects of study, but we have nevertheless had them dehumanised, objectivised and commodified. This lack of attention to human emotionality represents a serious flaw. Failure to correct it will eventually make social sciences appear "pale" and "indifferent", even irrelevant.

### Happiness and Sadness

The large wheel of every era leaves its own rut on the track of history. Today, personal relationships, relationships between societies and the

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre (trans. H. E. Barnes), *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Existential Ontology* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 623.

<sup>3</sup>Chan Kwok-bun and Tong Chi Keung, "Yizhang liankong, duoge mianju: Xinjiapo Huaren de shenfen renting wenti" ["One Face, Many Masks: Problems of Self-Identity Among the Singapore Chinese"] in *Ming Pao Monthly* (September 1999), p. 20–23.

relationship between time and space are undergoing fundamental changes as a result of overpopulation. To understand our entrepreneurs with this as the background, it is necessary to understand two characteristics of the times: increased mobility and multiple residences. What kind of picture does the daily life of mobile immigrant entrepreneurs present? With all the travelling, how do they strike the balance between their family and career? Mobility can bring business opportunities for entrepreneurs in their careers, but will it make their family life difficult?

Current studies have displayed, along with the lack of attention to the “human-ness” of business people, a very obvious tendency to “highlight just the good” (*ge gong song de*) about the family’s role in corporate management. Just as a coin has two sides, so does the family. In the management of a Chinese corporate, the family as a major support for the entrepreneur, as the first source of capital and as a provider of inexpensive labour, has attracted most of the scholars’ attention. Its positive role notwithstanding, the family also has its dark and merciless sides, to which existing literature has largely turned a blind eye. There are, for instance, the rivalry and conflicts among family members, which also constitute part of the Chinese entrepreneur’s daily life.

In addition, studies of entrepreneurial mobility have also focused on the positive sides of a mobile status of life, including pluralised ways of thinking and cross-boundary social networks, to name just a few. Yet despite the good it brings, there are apparent and latent constraints which we yet need to explore.

Human life is complex. People’s understanding of themselves is often not as crystal-clear as they imagine: sometimes they may even become strangers to themselves. “People are blinded”, as the Chinese would say, “when caught in a move; onlookers see the game better”. On the one hand, we wish to have an outsider’s view of the realities of our entrepreneurs’ world. On the other hand, we realise that completely detached interviews and research are bland and spiritless. It is indeed a herculean task to try and understand the realities of a circuiting entrepreneur’s corporate management and emotional world. The constraints of research

and the limited information that can be gathered have made it more difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of his personal identities, the details of his social networks and his actual managerial procedure. I wish, however, to develop an in-depth knowledge of his characteristics as a “businessman” and a “human being” against a larger social backdrop, as he tells his own story and as he reminisces about particular moments in his life.

In this chapter, I seek to bring together the disjunct fields of “personal identity”, “social networking” and “corporate management”, to form a tableau against which the relationship between our circuiting entrepreneur’s internal feelings and external business behaviour, as well as the surprises and frustrations that accompany his intensely mobile life, are dramatised. In addition, I have kept in mind that the entrepreneur, just like the normal human beings that we see in and around us, has his “human” emotions, “passions” and even “grieves”. I therefore wish to gain some insight into these least-explored aspects through my informants’ very own words. An entrepreneur reveals his emotions partly as a member of a group and partly as an independent figure; his emotionality partly takes shelter under his family’s roof, and partly goes adrift on his circuitous journeys. Here in this chapter, his happiness and pains, his vigour and frustrations, will gradually unfold.

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## A Two-Edged Sword

### Weariness

The needs of this type of business mean that mobile entrepreneurs have to live their lives in various locations. Their time each month has to be distributed between several different places. The boss who visits the government in City A today may have projects to discuss in City B tomorrow, and may have to hurry back to Hong Kong the day after tomorrow for a meeting with his bank. Career achievements bring a great deal of satisfaction for people, but a mobile life is tiring.

On a theoretical level, studies of mobility have shed light on and reconstructed the positive relationship between the mobility of people and their interpersonal networks. The cases of my informants have provided me with detailed life materials to “flesh out” that theoretical framework. The existing studies, however, have fundamentally focussed on the advantages of mobility and largely ignored its negative sides, which persist nevertheless and bring about all kinds of pain and frustration:

You feel weary when you travel around too much. Not in the physical sense. Mentally you feel even more burdened, since you're always in a hurry... You feel like, gosh, I'm burnt out. Are you really that tired, though? You're just sitting there, waiting to go through customs. But you feel truly exhausted in the mental sense... You didn't really feel that way when you started, but the weariness has accumulated, as you do the same thing day in, day out, year in, year out. Then you feel mentally exhausted. (Chin)

A life like this [circuiting between Hong Kong and the Fujian factories] is tiring enough. The weariness was most intense in the early days. But I knew I had to travel like this. Each time I came back from a trip, it would take a week for my life to go back to normal. The trips totally messed up the regular pattern of my life. All kinds of stuff would have heaped up at home. On top of the accumulated housework and laundry, there would be what was left undone at work, which was now very difficult to follow after you had left it aside for a while. It would take a week for me to get everything back to normal, before I could do shopping and lunch with my friends. I felt really bad those days. The mere idea of it just put me off. (Chai)

There is an age difference of 30 years between Chin and Chai. Yet their perennial shuttling among different places has left both the younger Chai and the older Chin feeling “wearied” and “exhausted”. Such a back-and-forth way of life is by no means easy for these business people. This life may appear easy because it is basically about “going through customs” and “taking a few trains or buses or aeroplanes”, but the mental stress it brings is not readily comprehensible for the onlooker. Toiling around various business locations, these circuit entrepreneurs are seldom found unloading this stress onto others.

## Emotional Islands

The market places a premium on profit; personal encounters are strictly for business purposes; it is seldom possible to make a bosom friend at business meetings. The mobile entrepreneurs travel to and fro between mainland China and Hong Kong; quite a few of them spend more time on the mainland than in Hong Kong every month. Although most of their time is spent at their mainland factories and offices, almost all the immigrant entrepreneurs indicate that their hearts are in Hong Kong. Thus, most of the time, their nomadic life is a lonely one:

I'm friendless here [in Guangzhou, where my company is]. No friends. We [the local people and I] have different lifestyles. We are polar opposites, culturally and in our ways of thinking. My friends are mainly in Hong Kong. I'll normally contact them when I'm back in Hong Kong, but not very often. Honestly, my daughters are the ones I want to see most each time I go home. I'll eat and talk with them. Then I'll go out with my friends if there's enough time. I normally stay for just one or two days... I really don't have much time for my friends. (Chun)

Emotionally I'm more dependent on Hong Kong, because I spend at least half of my time here. Most of my friends are here. When I come home, I like to stay with my friends chatting a bit. Business-wise, there's not much to do here, but friends are many. (Ngai)

I feel that I'm more attached to Hong Kong. I feel more like a Hongkonger because my home is here... I spend most of my time on the mainland, coming home only once a fortnight, mainly to see my family... But when I get into problems, I don't normally talk to my family. I don't want them to worry about me. (Kwok)

Chun's life in Guangzhou, where his company is located, is “friendless”, to use his own word. He feels he is too different from the local people, “culturally and in their ways of thinking”, to have any genuine friends. Chun's friends are mainly in Hong Kong, but work has kept him on the mainland most of the time. During his short stays at home, his primary concern is to be with his two daughters, so he is spending less time with his friends. In the past, he would play table tennis or football with his friends after work. Now, he spends nearly all his time in Guangzhou tending his business—but he has no friends there to do sports and hang out together after work. This

friendless life gives Chun a rather isolated feeling that he can do nothing about.

Ngai spends half of his time in Fujian, the other half in Hong Kong. While business-wise “there’s not much to do” in Hong Kong, he feels he belongs here because he has his friends and old schoolmates. Ngai is an active member on the alumni board, enthusiastic about its activities. But in the half-and-half allocation of time, he confesses, half of his life is friendless.

Kwok has two toddlers. His wife works in Hong Kong. Although he feels more attached to Hong Kong, he has to spend most of his time on the mainland. So when problems occur on the mainland, he normally talks with his native friends in the factory rather than with his family, because he does not want to worry his family. In real life, Kwok feels distant from Hong Kong, while emotionally he is more inclined towards it, hoping to find emotional anchorage here. Whenever he comes home to Hong Kong, he tries to hide all the problems at work behind the facade of a caring father and a good husband. On the one hand, he does not want his family to worry; on the other, he wishes to show his family, by covering up his problems at work, that he is capable of managing the company.

The life of an immigrant entrepreneur is ever divided in a constant shuttling between Hong Kong and the mainland, life and work. Spatial distances have created in him an emotional and psychological void. It is frustrating to have no friends to talk to in one’s workplace, but work makes it impossible to come back to meet friends in Hong Kong whenever one wants. Even when they are finally back, they have to make a choice between family and friends. At work, they live behind masks, and this life continues at home because, in order to uphold their own image as the family’s mainstay, they have to stick to the persona of a “successful” businessman. As the masquerade of life goes on, it exhausts itself in this internal stress—the emotional price one has to pay as an immigrant entrepreneur.

lives, which instead of displaying a linear continuity are punctuated with inconsistencies. In the words of Chai, the regular pattern of her life is entirely “messed up”. Indeed, for these tenders of multi-regional businesses, life is unavoidably torn between different places. The disruption of life’s regularity is not only a source of mental and physical stress, but also induces in these “shuttling nomads” a sense of rootlessness:

There is not so much of a home in my heart. It’s alright as long as my family is doing well. My native place, Hong Kong, and my work places all have their respective emotional appeals, but none has had as much of a draw on me as home. Deep down, I feel “rootless”. The native place now appears so distant, because I have been away for so many years; the work places haven’t had much of a grip on my heart either. I’m ready to settle for where my family can enjoy themselves. (Chuk)

I don’t feel I have a home. Where is my home? I come back to Hong Kong to my “house”, but that is not home. It’s only my house. Home should be a cosy place... Hong Kong is no home. So where is home?... A home should consist of not only me, but all those around me. The house where my grandparents lived was my ancestral home. The whole village knew each other. But now, when I go back, the home folks know me but I know nothing about them. Would you still call it home? I used to be so familiar with each of its trees, each of its lanes. But now I get lost in it. (Ngai)

These business people, who spend most of their time travelling, have learned to make themselves at home wherever they are while feeling “both there and not there”. They circuit from place to place, knowing a great deal about each one, but none has a particular draw and they often feel estranged. For the folks back home, these returning natives seem to be “one of us” yet at the same time are different. The difference alienates them. Perpetually suspended between being “inside” and “outside”, these mobile business people are frustrated by their rootlessness.

### Self-Estrangement

Immigrant entrepreneurs are also often perplexed and plagued by a sense of self-estrangement. In an age of convenient, efficient and speedy transport, they may still be among the metropolitan

### Everywhere Is Home, Nowhere Is Home

The instability of our immigrant entrepreneurs’ “nomadic roaming” inevitably disrupts their daily

hustle and bustle of Hong Kong in the morning and find themselves in an industrial city on the mainland of China in the afternoon. Such a mobile mode of life requires them to shift between languages and manners of speaking, and even change the way they look:

At this very moment, I feel like I'm a Hongkonger. It depends, of course, on who you're talking with. (Lok)

When we work together we mainly speak Putonghua. They (the partners on the mainland) will not speak Hokkien to me. I like to think I'm one of them, being fellow Fujianese people. Plus, we got to know each other through some relatives of mine. But they don't think this way. They tend to treat me as a Hongkonger... In fact, when I was negotiating with them, I also considered myself a Hong Kong businessman... You gotta identify yourself differently in different places so as to develop more trust for each other... It all depends on what you need. (Kam)

Like a chameleon who plays to a gallery, an immigrant entrepreneur can be a Hongkonger, a Fujianese, or anybody else at different times as they come into contact with different people. As immigrant entrepreneurs change their masks, they are allowed no transition period, which means they have to adapt themselves instantly to the new persona. This power of swift adaptation inevitably makes those around them suspicious of their sincerity. David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's (2001) study of children who accompany their parents on foreign assignments (referred to as "third culture kids") shows that this particular group has in a similar way aroused the suspicion of others: as they swiftly change their masks, their cultural value is increasingly being labelled as ambiguous, so much so that whatever they do or say is seen as dubious, underlined with no personal faith. Immigrant entrepreneurs, in their frequent changes of personal style as they travel in and out of various cultural practises and modes of behaviour, are often objects of dual suspicion. On the one hand, their authenticity is suspected by those around them, who doubt whether outwardly they are just putting up a facade. On the other hand, immigrant entrepreneurs themselves are growing unsure and sceptical about their own system of values. They feel they are losing themselves, not knowing who they are. This kind of

self-estrangement, or sense of being a stranger to oneself, is the source of their deep-rooted distress, which is not readily perceptible by others, neither understood nor sympathised with, even by their families. To overcome the distress, they put all of their energy and strength into their businesses, the very light of their life. The businessman in his most "ambitious" mood is possibly the most alienated from himself, when he is divorced from his own personal emotions.

## Strangers

In relation to their families, immigrant entrepreneurs cannot but live in alternate reunion and separation. Their family life is never "complete" in the ordinary sense. The ever-intense market competition is quite often a competition against time, when the days scurry past and family life turns out to be mere luxury:

My mom came with us to Hong Kong, stayed here for some time and returned to the mainland to continue her business... They [my parents] had thus been separated for a long time, living their own lives... For me, the result of such a family life in separation is that I came to feel less close to my mom... We no longer have much to talk about. It's not that we're not getting along. We do. It's just that we no longer talk as much. We no longer confide in each other, we no longer go shopping together, we no longer give each other advice on make-up or anything. We no longer do the usual stuff that other moms and daughters do together. I don't even talk to her about my relationships, and she never gets to know any of my friends. This is a real pity. I've always envied others having their mothers cook for them, take care of them. They may find their moms annoying, but I just wish I had my mom living with me. (Chai)

On average, I stay in Hong Kong for one or two days each week. Sometimes more, sometimes less... When I'm back, I usually stay with my family. My time is just that little. I have to see my kid and my husband, for as long as possible and then I need to go again. That's it... I've been too busy. (Lee)

Hustling to different places as they try to take care of their businesses and their family, our immigrant entrepreneurs often feel helpless. For most of the year, husbands and wives, parents and children, like in the case of Chai, are forced



apart, “living their own lives”, getting together only for as long as business allows. Lee’s child is only two. She has to hire a domestic worker to take care of the housework. Each Saturday she tries her best to come back from Dongguan, where her factory is, to see her husband and child. But sometimes problems in the business keep her from coming home. On the day of our interview she had just arrived home, but then a factory emergency forced her to leave again. The next day, after spending some time with her child, she went straight back to the factory.

Separation is involuntary and lonely. Yet when they finally get together, reunion can be no happier than separation. In the minds of the children who have been living away from their parents, the image of the absent parent is often a blur. This somehow estranges the children and their parents, “not that we’re not getting along. We do. It’s just that we no longer talk as much”. These business people fight against all odds, coping with all sorts of stress and distress, toiling and straining themselves, just to “make life better for their family”. In fact, when they come home from work, it occurs to them that what their children actually want is their mother at home cooking their favourite food and their father there playing with them in the park. The spouses of business people (mostly men) are often frustrated to find themselves sharing their bed with a stranger. Separation has kept their spouses ignorant of the adversities in business or of the reality of their daily life. The widespread reportage in the media of Hong Kong businessmen having mistresses on the mainland has made their spouses generally suspicious of their husbands. While I was not able to conduct interviews with our entrepreneurs’ wives, conversations in private have found the ladies distinctly resentful at and suspicious of their men. Some of the women suspect their men are already having an affair and feel they have to treat it as if nothing has happened. They have become pretenders.

The children find their dad a stranger as he is always away. The wife finds her husband a stranger because he seems to have given himself solely to his struggles in business. The local people find their boss a mere businessman who has

come for money, because business people, a group supposedly with no genuine sense of belonging, are expected to be where money is. The businessman, being a stranger in the eyes of others, will also find the others inscrutably distant. Between himself and them, there are gaps of varying sizes. What this sense of estrangement brings is an inexplicable fear that comes with the unease and frustration of being rejected. We have seen the glorious side of successful business people, but there is a price to pay, we are reminded, for that glory at the cost of personal feelings which are as unredeemable as they are invaluable. But have these business people ever had sympathisers?

## Encountering the Un/Real

The business field is a battlefield, where business people are tempered in deception and dishonesty. As a result, they are always instinctively following opportunities, so much so that they never come to fully enjoy the pleasure of interacting with the so-called “insiders” (*ziji ren*). Instead, they are always in search of opportunities, trying to see who could make the best partner in business:

It’s most lucrative selling paintings and calligraphy works. I made handsome money out of that. My sister knew of some Hong Kong companies that demanded paintings and calligraphy. So I began to collect such works on the mainland and then have these works sold to Hong Kong. This brought a substantial middleman margin, ranging from tens to hundreds of thousands... These items had largely come from my connections in Chinese artistic circles, some of whom were well-known painters and calligraphers. These people would often let her have their works for very little money or even for free. These friends were my invisible capital... My latest business was introduced to me by a former classmate at university... The first social network I mobilised was in Guangzhou and around Shenzhen. I had many of the people around me buy our products. Only three of my Hong Kong connections became my clients, after they agreed to visit me in Shenzhen. Now I’m trying to mobilise my connections in Xi’an. (Siu)

You need to always be on the alert when you’re doing business on the mainland. Many of these people won’t tell you anything about their personal background. When asked, they’ll simply gloss over

it. Doing business is basically about mutual deception... To mince no words, it's all about making use of each other. It's like that in every business. Say this guy's got all the source suppliers and construction teams, but I've got the orders. Then he'll feel that he won't get his hands on greater profits or that his business won't be secured in any way, unless he has established a special relationship with me. Now you see that it's all about resources sharing and exchange. (Yee)

Siu's most lucrative business was in paintings and calligraphy works. She would acquire works from her connections on the mainland for very little money and then sell them to Hong Kong companies at fairly high prices. Such a substantial middleman margin came as a result of making use of people as "friends". Through his own experiences, Yee has realised that doing business is basically about "mutual deception", about "making use of each other"; that the ultimate incentive behind a business relationship is to strike a good deal. A businessman's job is round the clock, meaning that unlike the ordinary employee they must have their business on their mind every moment of the day. For the businessman, life and work are intermingled. Driven by his professional instinct, the businessman is always consciously or unconsciously seeking to mobilise his connections, be they family members, relatives, friends, former schoolmates, native folks or colleagues, in order to attain his goals, thus turning emotional bonds to utilitarian calculations. He has utilised his relationships to such an extent that it becomes difficult to tell whether what he does is out of personal feelings or out of calculations of profit. There are often merciless consequences to this non-distinction of the real and the unreal: people come to have a great mistrust or dislike for the businessman and some even deliberately distance themselves from him.

It is generally believed that the friends one makes in business are not real friends since there are no emotional ties. A businessman quite often feels isolated from his old friends. "Who are my real friends?" he wonders on one solitary night, as he is seized by fits of loneliness and helplessness. In the media, however, business people are often portrayed as "resolute, staunch, unwavering

and self-composed" professionals, when in fact they are internally and externally stressed as they brave the challenges and cope with the deceptions of dishonesty in business:

My family has been running this business for decades. But things and people are rather different now from before. I know this because I've been at the front line. No one knows this better than me. I'll try what I feel is right. This has given me quite a lot of pressure... We're all emotional beings! When you feel dejected, you gotta hide yourself. You must appear energetic, not only to cheer yourself up, but also cheer up the others. At any rate, you need to boost the morale. Then I'll hide up in my room and cry the bad mood away. (Chai)

While her family has been in the garment business for years with a solid base of clients, Chai is still particularly cautious, especially in an ever-changing market, as she seeks to develop the business to which her parents have devoted their whole lives. Like other business people, Chai is far more stressed than the men she hires. Walking at the forefront of her business, she has to take care of her overseas clients while assisting her family in managing the factories. As a boss, she has to conceal all her concerns, worries and anxiety in front of her clients or staff. Her family, living away from her, are never able to offer timely comfort and consolation as problems arise. The pain that accompanies the inability to express oneself is unbearable. The professional that clients see, the leader that employers look up to and the philanthropist that the public respect, are roles performed and sustained under tremendous stress. Such personal sacrifices the businessman considers worthwhile because his sole concern is for his family to "live better".

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## **Family and Work: Sentiments and Swords**

### **Personal Emotions: Building and Destroying**

The role of the family or the extended family has been widely valued in studies of Chinese enterprises. In corporate management, the family as a major support for the entrepreneur, as the first

source of capital and as a provider of inexpensive labour, has attracted the most attention for its practical function, which was emphasised a lot during my interviews:

I didn't start from all naught; I got all this from my father... I mean, my father didn't start the company himself, but he gave me the money to start with... Father's help in our businesses was mainly financial. It played a crucial role, especially during the hard times. (Chiu)

My mom has been a tremendous help in my career. At each stage when there was a lack of money, she would offer to help. She's always there when I need help. (Lee)

Chiu's ten factories are now quite sizable, employing more than 4,000 people. Chiu gives the credit to his father, whose assistance "played a crucial role". The father has offered the most timely support in the hardest of times, which ultimately put the business back on track and enabled it to develop further. The shoe factory that Lee manages was founded by herself alone, and it now hires about 150 workers. As early as 1988, when she had just finished high school, she was already doing business with her mother. In 1994, Lee left Jilin for Guangdong, where she was to establish the shoe factory she is still running today. After more than ten years, Lee feels the most challenging part of her business is the factory's management, of which the biggest headache has been the problem of capital turnover. Fortunately, at each stage "when there was a lack of money", her mother was there to help.

The practical and economic function of the family and the extended family has been repeatedly highlighted in studies of Chinese enterprises. They have commonly adopted a functionalist approach to the family, whose powerful economic function is built upon the blood-based identity of being "one of us" (*ziji ren*), an identity that is being constantly constructed and strengthened by society to such an extent that a strong sense of ethical responsibility is internalised, urging family members to offer financial assistance when "one of them" is having a problem in business. Few studies, however, have analysed the function of the family from the perspective of "feelings". Organisations based on blood relations or

geographical relations, such as "native place associations" (*tongxiang hui*) and "clan associations" (*zongqin hui*), are to a certain extent important sources of financial support. The family, apart from functioning as an automatic teller machine, is more significantly a source of positive emotional support. Indeed, the rapports between families, between the family and the individual, have often evolved around personal "feelings". The family is where individual feelings are found most intensely concentrated; and individual feelings, in turn, constitute the core of the family structure. To truly understand the "family", whether on the individual or the corporate level, one must not neglect the influence of "feelings". During the interviews, my informants made as much mention of their family's "emotional" support as their financial assistance:

I don't usually talk to others about my problems except to my mother. That's because she's been a great help all along... She has given me tremendous support, whether in my personal feelings or in work. She's been standing behind me since I was very small. (Lee)

My wife is fluent in a number of foreign languages. She's very smart. Now I'm doing business with her. She's been so unstintingly supportive. Emotionally she's been an important support. (Yam)

I wouldn't have made it had it not been for my wife's support. (Yue)

Since I started my business, my family's support has been the only reason I held out till now. (Kei)

Invincible as they appear, these business people, being flesh and blood, when faced with the hardship and challenges in business, do sometimes feel bogged down and helpless—there are moments of vulnerability. The stress can be particularly huge in the early days of their business. In such cases, whether a business can survive the challenges and difficulties is largely dependent on the entrepreneur's will power and how he manages his own emotions:

The failure of a business is often the result of the boss's inability to cope with stress. As a boss, one has to bear an awful lot of pressure. So EQ management is very important. If you have a poor EQ, then it's most likely that you'll sulk every minute of the day. You may easily get provoked or feel pressurised by the most trivial matters, which can turn out to be disastrous. (Chai)

Since I started this business, there have been few times that I felt truly anxious. But since the future is never certain, you never feel assured. In those beginning days, the company was still very small in size and there was little management work to do. Then you'd have to take everything on your own shoulders. (Lok)

Indeed, as a boss, one bears tremendous pressure; one is daily anxious about the development of one's business; and one jitters over "what might be looming ahead". As Chai sees it, the success of a business is directly related to one's ability to cope with stress. The Chinese say, "One never fails but collapses" (*bing bai ru shan dao*). If one fails in coping with stress and in managing one's mood, one collapses like a soldier in war because one's will has failed. In the face of stress, the family's support and consolation play a particularly positive role in helping one adjust one's mood, telling one to persist. In addition, in contrast to the deception and dishonesty that one finds in business, the family's loyalty undoubtedly gives a sense of security. While this does not mean there is always harmony and understanding in the house, there is at least one reason to hold out—one cannot collapse, because of the loved ones.

Just as the family's emotional support enables one to overcome the difficulties and challenges in business, so is one's emotional input in the management process conducive to corporate success. This is particularly true when the business is still seeking to expand, for in order to motivate the staff to devote themselves to the factory, there must be some kind of emotional commitment between the boss and his men:

I love my work, and I love the kids (the workers) in my factory... I adore them... I feel blessed because whenever a problem comes up, they're always there to give a hand. This is because I've been willing to help too when they get into problems. Now everybody will take the factory's problems as their own problems and are willing to work hard together for solutions. I think I've been right to have treated them as my own kids... This, I think, is pretty effective management. I call it "heart-for-heart" management. (Lee)

For a business to prosper, the boss must take a humanistic approach to management, that is, manage according to human nature. (Wing)

Both transactions and management evolve around "humans". One's success in business is largely related to one's relationship with one's clients, buyers, workers, suppliers, etc. To establish good relationships and to ensure that one's factory is doing well, one has to, in Wing's words, be "humanistic" and "manage according to humanism". Lee's factory currently hires about 150 people. She tends to treat young workers from other places as her own children. Her management philosophy is that one has to give one's heart for the heart of others. Thus, apart from the practical relationship of employment between Lee and her workers, they get along with an emotional commitment to each other. In fact, Lee's proves to be an excellent managerial strategy. Many of her employees have "come for a better life" from the economically deprived provinces. In the reality of the drastic urban–rural differences, rampant discrimination has driven home to these people that, once away from home, they have become "worthless". Being immigrants themselves and having experienced the mental impact of being away from home, immigrant entrepreneurs like Lee are more acutely aware of the psychological demands of being a "home-leaver" than the usual business people. The "emotional" ties are powerful, therefore, that bind them together with their home-leaving workers. Being home-leavers themselves, immigrant entrepreneurs have developed a stronger psychological attachment to the factories they have toiled to sustain, taking their factories as their homes, their workers as their "comrades", or fellow fighters, who share their life as work and work as life. The power of emotion is so great that it internalises the company's expectations as self-imposed demands on the workers themselves, pushing them to work harder and be loyal to their boss and company.

Just as "emotional affiliation" can play a positive role in the management of a business, so can it hamper or even destroy what a businessman has toiled to establish. Current studies of this negative aspect have focused on family businesses. Wong Siu Lun's (2003) survey of Hong Kong textile industrialists has shown that, in a family business, the use of one's relatives in the management can

put the business in jeopardy. Likewise, studies of overseas Chinese business people (Wong 1988; Rose 1993; Redding 1990; Gomez and Hsiao 2001) have revealed that, within a family business, rivalry and disharmony often arise among different interest groups. Most of the businesses I surveyed are SMEs (small and medium enterprises), which have been the result of years of our immigrant entrepreneurs' hard work. The survival of these businesses, particularly during the pioneering days, has relied primarily on the exploitation of the so-called "insiders" (*ziji ren*) who ungrudgingly provided low-paid or even free labour. Quite often, when the enterprise came on track, these early "trail-blazers" began to lag behind the times and, failing to follow the enterprise's development, became less competent managers. Even if they are not performing up to par, however, these family members and relatives stay in the company because their early contributions made their boss feel obliged to keep them. Feelings have got in the way of decisions:

Most of the people in management are friends and relatives. We decided who to hire, of course, but the decision was often related to [the company's] history... By all means, this has proved to be a managerial challenge... Once these friends and relatives were hired, they would only be re-located to other departments if they were later found unsuitable, unlike the openly employed staff, who will be fired instead... Now we don't normally hire people from the home town. There are only a couple of them still working in our factory. They have been here since the 1980s, when we just started. So we have kept them all along. (Chiu)

In the early days, most of the workers were from the home town. But as they worked on, they just couldn't keep up. These native folks were not very competent in general. Not educated. Most of them have turned 40, 50 now... But we don't normally lay them off even if they are less competent... There is no way that you cannot make use of a person; it all depends on how you use him. (Chuk)

If a relative is fired for incompetence, one has to bear a great deal of social pressure and could be denounced by other family members. The only option is to "keep the men and save the feelings". When the relatives fail to do their job in one department, they are usually re-located to another. About the inadequate performance of these "fellow

fighters" who blazed the trail with him, Chuk explains, "There is no way you cannot make use of a person; it all depends on how you use him". For a businessman who struggles in a world fraught with deception, the "loyalty" of those on his side is irreplaceable. But this emotional value judgment not only prevents the enterprise from becoming systematised, it hampers its overall development:

I have no idea about their (my business partners') backgrounds... Our good fellowship has made up for all that's missing between us. I never really assessed our partnership or investigated the market situation... We are all from Fujian after all, and we got introduced to each other by relatives. So we felt like we were in the same boat and had trust in each other. (Kam)

I got conned quite a number of times... Later (in 1999) I got conned again... It was a really bad experience. About HK\$400,000 were swindled from us... I had trusted this guy so much because he was friend of a friend of mine... I had trusted him because he was also from Fujian... We were put in a very embarrassing situation, because we got to know him through some very close friends... We were just not cautious enough. (Wing)

Through his uncle on the mainland, Kam got to know two local "upstarts". While Kam did not know much about these people, he believed his uncle's contacts were reliable, as he was on very good terms with this uncle. He became partners with them, without knowing much about them, and started a company, which got into various problems after operating for just six months. Then Kam realised that, because he was seldom in Fujian, he was not able to supervise the company's operations, nor was he aware of the company's fiscal situation, so much so that the business was running entirely outside his control, despite the fact that he had invested all of his savings in it. When the problems became more serious, he decided to quit without even negotiating with his partners, giving up all the money he had invested. Kam felt that "money was a small issue" and it was more important to maintain his fellowship with these people, as they had been introduced by his uncle.

Through a former schoolmate, Wing got to know a businessman from the mainland. He was a fellow Fujianese who had been introduced by an old friend, and Wing came to have trust in him.



He delegated him to take orders and develop business in the name of Wing's company. But the man worked against him, secretly selling the goods that other factories had left with them to offset payments, and embezzling all the proceeds.

Just as "water can both sustain and sink a boat", as the Chinese say, so the complication of personal feelings can both sustain and sink a business. On the Chinese market, where the business system is far from mature, business people, always on guard against possible fraud *out there*, are generally more willing to work with friends and relatives from the *inside*. Such an inclination exists, as James Coleman (1990, 1992) has observed, due to the existence of an intermediary entity which facilitates interactions between two parties who both trust this third party. The "trusted third party" as a mediator gives both parties the psychological assurance that helps to establish a successful partnership. The involvement of personal feelings and the complication of interpersonal relationships in the management process can create relatively strong internal ethical restrictions, reminding one of the high social price one has to pay if one goes astray. Business partnerships among the Chinese are built not so much upon restrictive legal agreement as on this consensual ethical bonding, which has often led to a lack of supervision and control. Thus, the overdose of trust often results in the abuse of trust. Much as one values "credibility" between partners, in reality the most trustworthy can turn out to be the least reliable. In an age of intense mobility, as they circuit among their various business locations, travelling entrepreneurs have actually grown more dependent on their local partners than the single-location businessman. In such cases, travelling entrepreneurs will have to take immense risks if the partner's "credibility" is the only thing they can rely on when other supervisory organisms are absent.

On the other hand, the mobility of the day has invested more "mobile" qualities in our travelling entrepreneurs than in the ordinary businessman. They have diverse interpersonal networks in different places. In each place, they have an identity, a mask, that helps them break into the local

business circle. For these "nomads", their highly mobile lifestyle decides that they cannot put all their time into one place and that their energy and emotions are bound to be divided. In the past, when life was far less mobile, people tended to have a strong emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the place where they were "born and bred". In this most mobile of times, however, business people may feel somewhat attached to each of their workplaces but the emotions are never strong. This will weaken their affective and ethical bonding with the local people and local things, as compared with the previous, less mobile generations. The dispersal of affection has also made the immigrant business people relatively "callous". In the past, when people's emotional attachment and social networks were so concentrated, they would have an immense price to pay if they failed to live up to the expectations of their community. But now, with the multiple passports of their multiple identities, people can change their place of residence whenever they like. Under such circumstances, one's "ethical credibility", which is based on affection, may be easily abused. This has unavoidably put our travelling business people in a dilemma: while they are perfectly aware of the importance of "credibility" and are actually trying hard to build up their own, their lifestyle in this specific age has forged their personality in such a way that they are practically destroying the "credibility" they are working so hard to establish. The intensity of mobility has caused their affections and emotions to fade, making their "ethical credibility" brittle.

### Travellers and Non-travellers

At any rate, one needs to be positioned within one's times. In an age of intense mobility, the problems that individual business people encounter may speak very well of society as a whole. As I have shown, considerable research has been done by others on the inappropriate use of personnel as well as the rivalry and disharmony among different interest groups within family businesses.



While the same problems, as my study shows, have extended into the Chinese family business in the new millennium, another outstanding issue has largely been neglected in existing literature, that is, the disagreement and conflicts between the family's travellers and non-travellers:

From my perspective, if we are to continue with the business, we will have to take some risks as everybody does. But for my father, the stakes appear just too high. You didn't even meet your partner in person, he says, you just phoned each other and sent each other facsimiles and now you're gonna sign the contract and wire them the money. He feels it's too much of a risk. But I think the other way. How else can we go about it? This is business! We all take risks! (Chai)

In the family's division of labour, Chai "walks at the forefront" and takes care of their overseas clients' requests. While her family stays in Fujian taking care of the factory, Chai is basically stationed in Hong Kong, taking charge of the local office and having to travel between Hong Kong, Fujian, where their factory is, and other countries, where she is to visit their clients. Conflicts have often occurred between Chai and her parents during the course of managing this business. On the one hand, Chai tends to "go about it as others do" and thinks that as long as the risk is predictable, it will be worth taking. Her parents, on the other hand, consider this way of doing business "too risky" and not worth a try. But having lived and worked in many places and seen much of the world, Chai knows that there are other ways, and widely practised ways, of doing business which may not be used by the Fujianese people nor even among Chinese companies in general. Her multi-regional experiences have undoubtedly widened her horizons and activated in her a pluralised mode of thinking, so much so that some of her ideas have struck her parents, who do not have overseas experience, as incomprehensible and even unacceptable. Indeed, the older generation of managers, intent on the "Chinese way of doing business", the older growth and management strategies that they believe have been proved effective over the decades, become defensive when their beliefs are challenged:

These [disputes over growth and management strategies] are not disputes that can be diluted in time. They will stay there until the older generation steps down. As long as they're involved, their influence is there. So it's essentially a question of whether they're willing to let their children take over. Now, everything has to be done with their consent. They will never say yes to what they think is risky... So you don't really have much decision-making power. (Chai)

With her master's degree, Chai is the best-educated member of her family. Having lived abroad, she speaks fluent English and is familiar with the English culture, which has helped to reassure her clients. In fact, many of the company's new clients were found by Chai and their Hong Kong staff. Yet in a family business, authority, rather than competence, determines one's status in the family. The older generation, unless they "step down" or "let their children take over", will continue to hold control over the company, when "everything has to be exercised with their consent" they may even become strangers to themselves.

The family, just like any other social organisation, is fraught with politics and power struggles that involve many factors. While much eulogised as a harmonious cosy nest, the family, the Chinese family in particular, is in fact the most stratified social unit. Far from being free of discord and conflict as it is idealistically portrayed, the Chinese family operates on a clearly differentiated power structure, in which each member is required to stay within his or her specific role. Having experienced diverse cultures, ideologies and values in their roaming lives, the younger managers' sense of value, their faith and dreams, have experienced tectonic changes. As they travel to different places, these modern nomads have their own culture clashes and conflicts. Consequently, they let go some of their old ideas and borrow new ones:

I was a traditionalist in the way I viewed things. Now I'm beginning to unfetter myself. I feel I don't have to stay in this tradition, which is full of [undue] responsibilities and pressures. (Chai)

Looking back at her schooldays in the UK, Chai feels the experience was actually a tremendous shock. At the time, she was the only Asian

student in her university dormitory, when all the others were Anglo-Europeans. Living and studying within this interracial community, Chai began to reflect on her own values and beliefs as she came to have more in-depth exchanges of ideas with students from different countries. When she finished her studies, she had also transformed herself and came out with entirely new ideas and expectations. Her family, however, remained in the original mode of thinking, hence the conflicts:

I was struggling a bit: Should I live up to the expectations of the folks back in Fujian or should I live my own life like Hongkongers do? The fact is: Once I'm back in Fujian in the company of my family, these questions will keep coming back to me. But when I'm back in Hong Kong, they'll be all gone. (Chai)

Quite often, tension develops between the traveller and the non-traveller, between change and fixedness. Whose expectations should one live up to? Should one be loyal to oneself or, putting on a mask, play the part expected by others? Such struggles are excruciating, but one cannot give vent to one's exasperation as it is, because in that case, disagreement and conflicts will arise:

At that time, I was thinking to myself: now if my dream was to make my family happy, I was doing exactly the opposite. I just made them worry. There were so many things to tackle in our business, and that gave rise to a lot of conflicts between us... Consequently I was so perplexed: why am I doing all this? It really wasn't worth all this trouble. I was lost: what on earth have I done? Maybe I just couldn't find where my true values were. (Chai)

Originally she had wished to do something in return for her family and "make them happy", but once they had to work together, Chai discovered that what she was doing could actually go against what she was hoping for. Chai was perplexed and began to wonder where her "true values" were. She toiled every day for the family business, only to discover it did not seem to be worth it. More frustrating was that, when conflict erupted, there was never a sound mechanism for negotiation with her family. The only solution, it seemed, was to compromise:

Now I've given up the idea of growing it (the family business). I'll only try to retain its clients, preserve its business, and stabilise its staff. I've given up the idea of expansion altogether. I no longer think about enlarging our recruitment or launching any plan to grow the business. (Chai)

The family business is a tyrannical business in which authority and status will have their sway. The only way Chai can cope with the frustration of such inherent conflicts is to settle for reality, adjust herself, compromise for the business's "stable" development and give up any hope of expansion. Each family drama seems to have the same theme, "All for the good of the family". As society sets up role expectations for each of its members, the individual within a family internalises such social expectations as self-imposed ethical restrictions. As a result, the afflictions one suffers—exploitation, struggles, unfairness, agony, frustration and despair—all get dwarfed when compared with the "largeness" of the family's good. But what is "the good of the family?" According to whom? Who says? This is neither negotiated nor substantiated. Rather, only the de facto trustee of the business will be in a position to define it.

## Life in Anticipation

Faced with the restrictions of the family business, one only hopes to "break away" and establish one's own career. The future is now, and all the trouble taken today should pave the way to success. In anticipation of a better future, one learns to look at the present as a temporary drilling session that equips one for the days to come:

Personally, I would like to do something I'd really like to do after this business has been stabilised. That is to say, when I can be away (from this family business), that is, when it can operate with no problem without me here, I will take time to develop my interest in other things. Or I might start another business. This is what I have in mind now. (Chai)

When the company has made a fair amount of money, I'll start my own business... But I'd like to build a farm of my own in the future, to have everything in my charge. Now I'm helping my sister manage the company. I see this as a kind of training.

I've learned a lot during my stay here on the mainland. Now I know everything about this business. (Ngai)

Both Chai and Ngai are running their family businesses, and both feel that their talents are being restricted. They feel ambivalent about their status. In front of their clients, they are the “bosses”, and make decisions. At home, they are the juniors of the house, “fledglings” who have yet to grow. They have been forced to postpone their ambitions and plans and hold out until they can “break away” to develop their “interest in other things” or even to “start another business”. They are convinced these dreams will come true and that the family business is giving them the kind of training important for their future “identity”. Hope gives them power and lets them turn negative factors into positive ones.

A life of mobility gives the circuit entrepreneur access to more diverse information than it does the non-traveller. The comparison and contrast between places allow our traveller to develop better insight into the advantages of each place. For our travelling businessman, each place is lovely and ugly in its own way, each fulfilling him in some way and yet leaving him dissatisfied in others. His is a life in anticipation. And the hope for a better tomorrow is what motivates him to go further:

I feel that I'll step beyond Asia and find a world of my own. I don't know where that world will be. It will have to depend on where my business takes me. (Ngai)

My goal is to spread Chinese martial arts overseas with the help of Tian Hu (alias of a certain health product)... I'm hoping to take the Xi'an martial arts team to other countries. Tian Hu is a truly big platform, and I'm determined. (Siu)

Having experienced a multitude of cultures in such constant to-and-fro manoeuvres, immigrant entrepreneurs, compared with ordinary people, are generally more imaginative and harbour more splendid dreams and expectations for the future. They are not satisfied about their current identity and are instead looking forward to their future selves. Ngai, for example, is not happy about his current identity and is seeking to find a world of his own, which, he envisages,

will be the best place to develop his own career. Siu, on the other hand, aims to spread Chinese martial arts, of which she is an aficionado, to the rest of the world. Through co-operating with other companies, she seeks, in particular, to take the martial arts team of her hometown to other countries with the help of powerful corporations. The present, it appears to them, is never enough and always in want of something. It is precisely such anticipation of the future, of what will come next, that allows our immigrant entrepreneurs to be so fluid, that gives them a force putting them ever on the move. They are aware that all dreams lie in the future, when the future lies in the present—this is the very dynamo that pushes immigrant entrepreneurs to develop their business in multiple areas, not only in China, but beyond Asia, in the rest of the world. This is one of the fountainheads of globalisation, the very impetus to humanity's ceaseless exchanges and progress.

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## Conclusion

Mobility is vividly polymorphous. There is an intriguing story behind each incident of human mobility. Yet just as it brings us joy and pleasure, mobility also turns upon us with its woes and challenges. We have seen in our immigrant entrepreneurs an energetically positive relationship between mobility and entrepreneurship. These “new immigrants”, having come from economically backward parts of China, carried so much hope in their hearts as they arrived in their new home. But their identity as “mainlanders” was often a negative label. On the one hand, the prejudice and contempt from mainstream society brought them a great deal of frustration and bitterness. On the other hand, as “outsiders” to be excluded, they were confronted with a disadvantaged opportunity structure. With their English lagging behind and themselves being restricted to the much stigmatised “leftist schools”, “new immigrant” kids were never able to make a name for themselves like the local children could do with a good education in this “elitist” society.

Underlying their growth and success is a series of battles against unfair treatment from mainstream society: on one hand, they came to realise that, as “new immigrants”, they would have to suffer more than others; on the other, they were ready to fight back, knowing they would never make it unless they went all out. So these new immigrants, having “failed” in school, decided to go into business. The “shame” imposed upon them by their “new immigrant” identity became what motivated them in life. Various studies have praised the “diligent” and “hardworking” character of new immigrants, but they were not born with such a character, it was shaped by life’s adversity. The “shame” they felt was exactly what goaded them into the pursuit of a new identity which would not be looked down upon, and that of a “boss” or an “entrepreneur”, for example, is certainly something to be marvelled at.

The road to entrepreneurship is rugged. The personality transformations that come with early immigrant experience became a kind of essential cultural capital for corporate management. Their resolve, practicality and confidence have enabled immigrant entrepreneurs to persevere. Their shuttling lifestyle has also familiarised them with local wisdoms. Their mastery of local dialects/languages, knowledge of local customs and understanding of the local ways of business have transformed them into “cultural chameleons” that can invoke and assume different “shared local symbols” as they come to interact with different people. In so doing, they manage to shorten the psychological distance between each other, thus extending their interpersonal networks to facilitate corporate management and development. Having “one face” and “many masks” has proved to be an asset. Their life and work experiences in different places have given them a pluralised mind and driven home to them that there are in fact diverse ways of tackling a problem. Indeed, by pluralising their solutions, entrepreneurs have successfully overcome different difficulties and challenges during the course of management. “The range of an individual person”, Peter Berger (1963) aptly observes, “can be measured by the number of roles he is capable of playing”. And

the range of performance for immigrant entrepreneurs understandably extends wider than the non-traveller, as they skilfully shift among their many identities and roles in multi-regional business operations.

Mobility, however, is a double-edged sword. Their intense mobility makes immigrant entrepreneurs the spokesmen of this nomadic lifestyle; what they have gone through and experienced in person testifies to the joys and agonies, fortunes and misadventures, of life. In this intense fluid mode of existence and perennial back-and-forth manoeuvres across space, immigrant entrepreneurs are not only fatigued but also plagued by a sense of self-estrangement and defamiliarisation. For these people, who are trapped in an intermittent circularity of coming and going, “home is everywhere and nowhere”; the places where they live and work, the people they see every day, are all familiar and yet distant. Perpetually suspended between being “inside” and “outside”, they are afflicted with a sense of being a stranger to oneself, a rootless frustration which is not always perceptible to others, not understood nor sympathised with, even by their families.

With their businesses and lives scattered about different places, immigrant entrepreneurs have found themselves racing against time and being torn between business and family. In their fight against time, in the ceaseless shuttling and selfless devotion to work, they lose control of themselves and temporarily forget that, emotionally, they are in limbo. Here, we see the ultimate conflation of life and work. “It is alright as long as my family is doing well” and “I’m only trying to make life better for my family” become the most often heard refrains in this intense mobility (Chan 2003b). These are decent excuses indeed that rationalise all the indecent and inadequate—absence from parent meetings and birthday celebrations, lack of time for one’s wife and children—because even debauchery can be counted as “courtesy” carried out “for the sake of the business, the company, and for the good of the family”.

There is a price to pay for this frequency of social and business engagement, be it for the

business, for the company, for the family's good, for better or worse. The absent husband/father gets marginalised in emotional terms: with the children distancing themselves and the wife growing suspicious, he becomes the stranger in the family. Our immigrant entrepreneur toils every day "for the good of the family", but may not be aware of the discrepancy between what he is trying to give and what his family truly wants. The disruption of family life is the result of an endless seesaw between life and work, a battle which he both wins and loses. Torn and perplexed, he can only hope that concentrating on work will help drown their sorrows.

In fact, the businessman not only feels distanced from his family for their lack of understanding and sympathy, but finds in himself a stranger as well, due to the "false self" that lurks inside him. Just as business practitioners are trained to keep their emotions in check in front of clients, so we are requested, in the course of socialisation, to act and speak in public according to the roles that are expected of us by society. Our feelings are, in other words, "managed feelings". As he tends his business in different places, the immigrant entrepreneur's social networks become increasingly complicated, so much so that every day coming in and out of various social structures, he is living in a sophisticated fabric of affirmations and negations. Confronted by different social environments and power structures, he is compelled to make prompt judgements and evaluations of his object of interaction so as to assume the right identity, use the appropriate communication strategies, or even to change the way he communicates altogether. Because of the instabilities of this nomadic existence, the immigrant entrepreneur's authenticity often baffles and even appears dubious to those around him. As Arlie Russel Hochschild (1983) has pointed out, a professional actor will sometimes find it difficult to come out of the role he is playing and eventually the role becomes part of him without his even knowing it. By the same token, when day in and day out the businessman has to change his masks to different settings, like an actor who plays to a gallery, the "mask-changing" will

become part of his life and character to such an extent that he confuses his true self and the role he plays, and he ultimately fails to "come out" of his camouflage even when he is with his family, his loved ones. As one is being plagued by one's sense of self-estrangement/defamiliarisation and baffled by one's very own inauthenticity, we come to realise that the price one has to pay for mobility is unquantifiable.

Home and work take up a large portion of one's life. We have given much credit to the positive functions of the businessman's family, and yet an understanding of its darker sides is yet to be achieved. For a researcher who seeks to explore the family's functions from the outside, what she can glean from the businessman's account will be nothing other than a glossed-over tale haunted by the storyteller's cautious attention to his own image. This is because people are inclined to portray their domestic lives according to the "model family" flaunted by our social culture; and businessmen, not being an exception, will try their best to play R. D. Liang's (1972) "happy family game". But behind the closed doors, in total contrast to the warmth and harmony that appears from the outside, there may be a repertoire of conflicts, power struggles, even violence and pain.

Current studies of the family business have generally focused on the practical economic function of the family, and have largely neglected its emotional functions and even dysfunctions. For one thing, the immigrant entrepreneurs I interviewed have unanimously stressed the family's emotional support. The family as an individual's emotional anchorage differs from other social units for its significant involvement of personal sentiments. The complication of personal feelings into the management process, as I have shown, can both sustain and sink a business; and there is a fine line between growth and destruction. As far as the family business is concerned, while the family's dreams are what goads one to work and the family's good is what one strives for, the family could ironically be the first place one wishes to flee. In an age of intense mobility, conflicts within the family become ever more



pluralised and complicated. In the past, the family used to live together, but in this most mobile of times, the family is forced to live apart. The gulf between the traveller and non-traveller is not only in space, but in ideology, emotions, and in the value system. As the traveller in his nomadic roaming lets go of some of his older self and incorporates new elements, he extends and enriches his own social imagination in this pursuit of new identities. Yet such self-transformation may not be readily understood, recognised or accepted by the people around him, hence the conflicts. While much eulogised in current studies as a model location of “self-sacrifice” and “infinite love”, the family is in fact fraught with gender and generation politics, and shot through with the inevitable tension between the traveller (businessman) and the non-traveller (his or her family), between kindred sentiments and business analyses. When conflict erupts, there is no other solution than to compromise, “all for the good of the family”. Under the mammoth banner of the family, the dreams of the young are to give way to the authority of the old, and the wishes to grow the business have to yield to conservatism within the family. Such conflicts are, however, not altogether negative, as “all revolutions begin in the transformation of consciousness” (Berger 1963, p. 136). The minds of the travellers and non-travellers, younger and older generations, are undergoing a gradual transformation as the clashes spark a quiet revolution.

Man as an emotional animal cannot feel good when he comes into conflicts and clashes with others. In such circumstances, one can only hope for a better future, hoping that one day one will eventually break away from the family business, and from its “patronisation”. The future is now, and the trouble one takes today should pave one’s way to some splendid success tomorrow. The anticipation of a better future, the pursuit of a future identity, is what moves one ahead.

What is the practical significance of sociological studies? When Auguste Comte introduced the term “sociology” (“sociologie”) as a neologism, he was experiencing a personal as well as social dilemma: the country was plunged into total anarchy, while he was worn out from personal

tragedies. Both urged Comte to look into the relationship between science and society, and to find the possibilities of putting society back in order. The idea of “social positivism” reveals Comte’s expectations for sociological studies to facilitate our understanding of the problems and needs of man and society to reform and improve current social conditions. Yan Fu (1925, 1996), a nineteenth-century scholar, was the first to translate the term “sociology” into Chinese, explaining that “sociology”, being a kind of scientific study, examines “changes and transformations of a given society so as to know its whence and predict its whither” and “reveal[s] the laws that govern [social] development”. Indeed, the ultimate aim of sociological study is not simply to fulfil human understanding in academic terms, but more importantly, to apply its findings to real life. It shows us the way we live, with the goal of improving the way we live; it changes our lives, as it has come from life and must return to life. Again, as Karl Marx puts it, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point is to change it”.

The times proceed without let-up. In an age of mobility, it is an inescapable trend for man to get going. With migrants being “the possible pioneers in the evolution of cultures and civilizations” (Chan 2003a, 2004, Chan & Chan 2011), a mobile sociology will become what precedes and leads sociological studies in general. Since man, in interaction with society, is the primary object of study in sociology, any research will become drab and biased if it deviates from man’s emotionality. Georg Simmel (1959) has stressed that sociology must probe man’s inner emotional experience, the best points of departure being our society’s aesthetic outlook and our arts. As we advocate the study of mobile sociology in the new century, we are also in urgent need of a sociology of emotions. Admittedly, there are multiple ways to man’s emotional experience, which have been expressed, during the course of history, in literature, music, drama and the fine arts. This prompts me to wonder whether sociological approaches could not be more varied and flexible. For sociology to live a more vigorous and lively existence, the only

way forward, as I see it, is probably to move beyond its own confines and become interdisciplinary. Once it manages to transcend the boundaries between disciplines, sociology as a cross-boundary branch of the humanities will have a greater and more global involvement in our understanding of life.

Now we are reminded of Comte's famous dictum, which says, "From knowledge comes prevision; from prevision comes power". ("Savoir pour prévoir, prévoir pour pouvoir.") For it is the aim of my study to examine, by looking at the life experiences of migrant entrepreneurs, the intrinsic traits of "mobility", its positive and negative effects on man's everyday life, the joys and agonies it has brought to modern man and woman—and ultimately to provide, in the words of Peter Berger (1963, p. 53), "a broad, open, emancipated vista on human life".

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## Family and Marriage: Constructing Chineseness Among Long-Established Australian-Born Chinese

Lucille Ngan Lok-sun

Throughout history, Chinese communities have spread all over the world with some 12 million<sup>1</sup> Chinese moving out of China from the 1820s onwards and having managed to establish themselves by building families in different social environments (Skeldon 1995). Prior to the nineteenth century, a number of diasporic Chinese communities were already scattered overseas, even though in China, Chinese immigration overseas was fundamentally one of prohibition. The majority of those overseas saw themselves as only living temporarily abroad and their family networks were largely grounded within China. In the case of Australia, during the early gold rush era, Chinese men migrated to the goldfields in search of gold while their wives remained with their children in China waiting for their husband's return with wealth and fortune. By the end of the nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> the political attitudes towards overseas movement changed and living abroad was no longer considered a treason or crime. Chinese who were successful elsewhere could become an asset to the Chinese empire through the skills and expertise they

acquired overseas. In 1893 the lift of the ban on foreign travel was in reality only a removal of a defunct symbol, as there had been illegal movements all through the past. This act gave official recognition to diasporic Chinese for their contributions and it encouraged them to identify not only with their provincial homes, but also with China and Chinese civilisation. What is important, as Wang (1985, p. 70) reminds us, is that the vast majority of those of foreign nationality, and their subsequent generations who have been far distanced from China, still consider themselves to be ethnically Chinese or are considered so by others. Wang (2000, p. 64) argues that in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a “sharpening of the sense of Chinese identity, the prelude to the nationalism that was about to burst upon all Chinese”. This was the beginning of a period that marked the celebration of Chineseness, a sense of unification and security for overseas Chinese.

Collective identities such as Chineseness have provided an organising principle to understand larger areas of social life—in particular, the social location of a particular racial or ethnic group in relation to others within a community—as they have been built upon complex traditions of family structures, politics, ethics, identity and culture through the passing of time. Cultural characteristics such as “race” and “ethnicity” have come to be essentialised elements of an identity, consolidating not only the subdivisions of humankind but also a social hierarchy, established through racial and

<sup>1</sup>Although there are many estimates about the exact number of overseas Chinese, figures are imprecise.

<sup>2</sup>Under the Qing Court.

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cultural boundaries (see Abu-Lughod 1991; Chambers 1994; Hutnyk 1999; Papastergiadis 2000; Young 1995). Race has commonly been perceived as visible physical divisions among humans that are hereditary, reflected in morphology and roughly captured by terms like “black”, “white” and “Asian”. Furthermore, language is also used as a cultural attribute for authenticating identity. Such forms of identification inevitably involve some level of stereotyping that is a process of externalising, distancing and naturalising the designated through the construction of difference in relation to the self, in order to establish identity (Pickering 2001). In this way, stereotypical attributes provide the pre-eminent basis on which an individual is ethnically assigned and categorised (Gilroy 2004, p. 25).

For example, the common western projection of “being Chinese” entails some form of racial or ethnic collectivism which is specifically traceable to a predefined cultural territory, confined within the boundaries of the political state of China, being able to speak the Chinese language and conventionally related to the “yellow race”. Furthermore, the notion of “Chinese” is synonymously associated with Han Chinese identifiable among others by epicanthic eye folds and a relatively small stature. Such a process of unconscious labelling has become a usual practise in multicultural Australia where contemporary representations of Chinese people are often reinforced through the bombardment of manipulated media images such as exotic Chinese banquets, “nerdy” Chinese students and thrifty Chinese people.

However, essentialised notions of identity which assume orderly patterns, static positions and biological traits have become seriously challenged by postmodernists (Ang 2001; Gilroy 1987, 2000, 2004; Kibria 1998; Balibar 1991). This is because they often ignore historical and social changes and neglect internal differences within a group by only acknowledging the experiences that are common to everyone (Moya 2000). As highlighted by overseas work on the Chinese diaspora such as Leung’s (2004) research in Germany, Man’s (2004) work in Canada, and Greif’s (1974) and Ip’s (2003) studies in New

Zealand, diasporic Chinese in Australia, like any overseas Chinese diasporic communities, are embedded in complex communal relationships constructed along divisions of birthplace, language, gender, generation, occupational background and political and religious affiliations. The word “Chinese” could equally be qualified by “Australian”, “Malaysian”, “Thai”, “Philippine” or “American”, without signifying any underlying consciousness or unified opinion regarding ethnic or cultural identity. As I have discussed elsewhere, these divisions change in time and space across the life course, carving out dynamic socio-cultural spaces for different individuals (Ngan 2008). Furthermore, increasing transnational movements and continuous transformations through the intensification of global flows of resources, people, capital and information have modified local conditions in all aspects of life (Axford 1995, p. 164).

These factors have led to a situation where the construction of identity for Chinese migrants and their descendents often occurs in a state of liminality—that is, a feeling of being suspended in-between cultures or in borderlands—thus transforming the collective notion of a shared Chinese identity. Yet, this single word has been and continues to be used by the West to represent an extraordinary multiplicity of meanings, consequently it has become the basis of social and political tensions. Thus, the monolithic construct of “Chinese” needs to be re-addressed in order to better our understanding of the emergence of a new kind of diasporic experience for “Chinese” overseas.

In the case of Chinese Australians families, there has been a growth in ethnic diversity as a result of the increase of numbers, in contrast to the large Canton-based origins of early Chinese migrants in the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it has to be noted that even though the majority of early migrants were from the Canton province, the ethnic make-up of this group was diverse; people came from various districts of Canton such as Chungshan, Toishan and Kaoyau, and were often separated from each other because of the different dialects spoken (Choi 1975, pp. 3–16). Today, Chinese Australians are even more diverse

in their national and ethnic origins. Taiwanese, Hongkongers and Shanghainese, for example, are among the fastest growing segments of the Chinese Australian population. There has also been a general shift away from the largely working class origins of the late nineteenth to early twentieth century Chinese. While there are considerable social and economic diversities within the Chinese Australian population today, it is also the case that many post-1965 Chinese immigrants came from professional, white-collar and highly educated backgrounds. As such, there is really no single or any one Chinese identity at all. As Chan (1999, p. 6) rightly argues, “there is not and never was, a single community we can call the Chinese community in Australia”. There is great diversity within the broad category of “Chinese Australians” through their different life experiences and ethnicity, and this diversity may partly explain why some individuals may see themselves as Chinese, yet others may feel the term is imposed on them. As such, Chinese identity is a negotiated and unstable assemblage of perceptions; nevertheless, as an essentialist construct, it has been critically significant in organising notions of sameness and difference between external and in-group members.

This chapter explores the notion of Chineseness through the experiences of individuals of long-established Chinese Australian families. It provides a conceptual framework to understand their social positioning in relation to mainstream Anglo-Celtic Australians and other Chinese communities living in Australia. In doing so, an important aspect seems to involve authenticating their Chineseness which is determined by the prime questions of “what is” and “what is not” Chinese. However, as I highlighted, the negotiation of Chineseness is a fluid process characterised by ambivalence and contradiction. Thus, the very suggestion of understanding social positioning through Chineseness through notions of authenticity risks the danger of being identified as engaging with the flaws of essentialism which sees “truth” and authenticity as qualities that are fixed, static and persistent over time. Interestingly, while much has been written about identity, there has been a tendency, particularly by postmodernists, to delegitimise the concept itself by revealing

its ontological and political limitations (Moya 2000). The postmodernist critique of identity that I am highlighting should be understood partly as a corrective to an a prior social tendency towards essentialism. The problem with essentialist conceptions of identity is the tendency to posit one aspect of identity as the single cause that determines the social meanings of an individual’s experience. While the postmodernist debates on the theoretical ambiguities of identity have gained much credence, socially embedded essentialist notions have been and still are serving as the fundamental organising principle of human beings. The fact is that “Chinese” is real in giving meaning to everyday life—as there would be millions of people in the world that would identify themselves as Chinese in one way or another, either voluntarily or impinged upon by others.

As such, rather than dismissing such a notion as postmodernists insists, I argue that it is important to examine the construction and operation of identity as Chineseness in the daily lives of diasporic Chinese. How does being Chinese take on meaning? How does being part of a Chinese family impact on how one meets daily pressures and manages life’s changes? What are the varying degrees of its complex hegemony? Although the ambivalences of “being Chinese” have been critically significant for understanding how identity is negotiated, the theorisation of Chineseness would be incomplete without a concurrent problematisation of its configuration of power that stratifies the hierarchical positions of the diasporic Chinese in differing social situations. This chapter examines the Chineseness of subsequent generations of early Chinese migrants in Australia and the implications it has on their social positioning within the cultural spaces they inhabit in their daily lives. Specifically, I take the racial and social attributes of physicality and language and explore their significance on strategies of subject making and how essentialised boundaries serve to consolidate subdivisions within and across Chinese Australian communities.

Data for this chapter is derived from a study which examined the everyday experiences of Chineseness of subsequent generations of early



Chinese migrants in Australia. It involved in-depth interviews with 43 Australian-born Chinese whose families have resided in Australia for over three generations. The interviews assumed the appearance of ordinary everyday conversation with the aid of a semi-structured interview schedule set around a list of broad topics fundamental to the study. It is important to note in advance that while I did not explicitly frame the interview questions to elucidate what interviewees thought of certain postmodern concepts such as hybridity and in-betweenness; nevertheless, several informants spontaneously offered interesting views about held theoretical positions. The interview sessions were audio-taped and lasted approximately one and a half hour which were later directly transcribed by an external transcriber and myself. In-depth response provided insights into the ways in which informants identified themselves and their social experiences within Australia. Quotations from the interviews are selected to reveal the critical aspects of informants' experiences. For the sake of clarity and brevity, a profile of the informants referenced directly in this chapter is given in the Appendix. I address those who were born in Australia and whose parents (either one) were also born in Australia (or third-plus generation Australian-born Chinese) as "long-established" ABCs.<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity of interviewees.

### **Familial Influence on Racial and Cultural Discourse**

Before proceeding with an analysis of racial and cultural discourses, it is appropriate to highlight the marriage patterns of my informants' families

as it has consequential implications on their phenotypic characteristics and language ability. These features are often hegemonically constructed as an initial sign of identity regardless of their particularities of personal history. All participants are Han Chinese, whose family originated from Guangdong Province situated in the southern part of China mainland. Out of 43 participants, 28 claimed there has been no interracial marriage with a Westerner in their line of the family. Of the 15 where interracial marriages occurred, continual intermarriages throughout the generations only occurred in the families of two informants.<sup>4</sup> None of the participants could read or write Chinese, only a handful were able to speak the language.

While the criteria of locating participants were based on their birthplace, i.e. Australia and the generational distance from China, i.e., they departed from China for at least three generations on at least one side of the family, there have been few occurrences of interracial marriages, which has allowed them to retain a "Chinese" appearance.<sup>5</sup> One of the contributing factors is the persistence of Chinese moral values and the influences of the changing social contexts. The White Australia Policy in 1901 transformed Chinese residents into "domiciles" with restricted rights. During the years of the "white" policy, Chinese families were excluded from the political, social and economic life of mainstream Australia due to immigration restrictions, economic regulation and racial discrimination within broader society (Choi 1975). The result was a steady decline in the numbers of Chinese people

<sup>3</sup> The term "long-established Australians" was used in the 2001 Census data on ancestry to describe respondents as belonging to a particular generational group. Since this study focuses on the experience of the descendants of Chinese migrants, "Australian" is replaced with "Australian-born Chinese" (ABC) to emphasis their ancestry. It needs to be noted that while the categorisation according to birthplace is conceptually neat, the definition quickly proves problematic in the face of empirical realities, e.g. it is not possible to differentiate between third and higher orders of generation.

<sup>4</sup> My purpose is not to categorise individuals according to their racial heritage—the point of such detail is an attempt to illustrate their appearance as they are often identified as Chinese based on their "looks".

<sup>5</sup> Another factor influencing the diversity of the sample particularly in terms of interracial marriage family background arose from the selection method. Because of stated interest in examining how they experienced Chineseness in everyday life, it was inevitable that those who were interested in participating in my study felt they were Chinese even if it was only to the slightest extent. These individuals often came from Chinese families where there were few interracial marriages through the generations. Nevertheless, their experiences are significant in providing perspectives and insights into "Chineseness" with respect to generational longevity.

in Australia (Williams 1999). Furthermore, due to immigration restrictions, the Chinese female population was extremely small—consequently, many returned to China to find a bride (Choi 1975). To endure being on the margins of mainstream Australian society, Tan (2001, p. 2) explains, “Chinese families relied on the cohesion of the family as a tightly-knit unit for social and economic survival”. As such, in-groups marriage with a Chinese partner was largely a necessity for daily living.

In the families of long-established ABC, it is certainly evident that a number of the first and second generation migrants did return to China/Hong Kong and “got married”. Furthermore, if families had the opportunity, many tried to send their children back to China for a period of time to get some Chinese education so as to learn the Chinese language and Chinese way of life. While return marriage and Chinese education were a normative mentality among migrants in the early part of the 1900s, with increasing growth of Chinese migrants in Australia because of the influx of refugees due to Japanese aggression in China and the Pacific in the 1930s and 1940s, the generations of this period were able to engage in relationships with overseas-born Chinese. As a result, Williams (1999, p. 2) explains, there was “a new generation of Australian-born people of Chinese origin”. This “new generation” can be exhibited by the marriage/relationship pattern of subjects and their parents.<sup>6</sup>

This behaviour can best be illustrated in the previous generations of Andrew’s family. Although his great grandfather was the first generation to come to Australia from Canton in the 1880s, there were continuous returns to China throughout the later generations. The pattern of movement and marriage was similar for his great grandfather, grandfather and father—all born and educated in China, migrated to Australia to work in later years, returned to China to get married, then back again to Australia to work. Andrew explains because there were very few Chinese

women in Australia during the early period and the mentality of Chinese was to only marry people of the “same kind”, they had to go back to his ancestral village to find a bride. Andrew, aged 65, was the first in his line of the family to be born and married with a first-generation Hong Kong-born migrant in Australia. He still communicates in Chinese with certain members of his family although he mainly speaks English in his daily life. As for his children, they do not speak Chinese but are married to Chinese partners. Andrew explains that there is no need for them to maintain the Chinese language as Chinese Australian communities are no longer marginalised as in the past but Chinese moral values they hold still implicate on their choice of partners. This glimpse into his family highlights the persistence of the Chinese values in long-established Chinese Australian families. Chinese familial values and marriage patterns thus have important implications on the carving of identities of subsequent generations. Cultural and physical attributes provide the pre-eminent basis on which an individual is ethnically assigned and categorised.

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### **You Can’t Be One of Us Because You Look Different!**

A brief highlight of the changing social context in Australia is necessary in understanding the construction of difference and identification for “Chinese-looking” Australians. Immigration was a major focus of class struggle in the nineteenth century Australia as employers called for recruitment of non-British labour to restrict the power of trade unions. By the end of the century, there was an emerging sense of Australian nationalism, based on the stereotypes of the “yellow peril” — the fear of an Asian invasion into the sparsely populated continent. MacQueen (1970) explains that there was an intimate link between racism and the emerging feeling of Australian identity and nationhood, creating a new egalitarian society while maintaining British culture and heritage. By the time of Federation in 1901, the White Australia Policy was seen by most Australians as fundamental for national survival. One of the initial legislations passed by the new Federal

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<sup>6</sup>30 out of 43 subjects had one or both parents born overseas, with the majority born in Mainland China and Hong Kong, 16 out of 26 non-single subjects have a partner who is first- or second-generation ABC.

Parliament was the Immigration Restriction Act, which excluded the migration of non-Europeans with the intention to create a culturally homogeneous and cohesive “white” society. However, as it became apparent that insufficient British immigrants wanted to enter, recruitment was broadened to other parts of Europe, including Italy, Greece and Spain. Compared to Asian migrants because of their European background and appearance, (Vasta 2005), they were considered as immigrants who could rapidly become indistinguishable from the existing Anglo-Australian population.

Even in the 1950s overt racial segregation was still apparent. This is highlighted by an informant’s experience when he returned from Papua New Guinea (PNG) to Sydney in the 1950s. Jerry’s parents were born in PNG and because of the breakout of war, they were deported as refugees to Sydney in 1941 where he was born in 1942. Due to their refugee status, the family was reluctantly sent back to PNG in 1949. However, through continuous appeals they were later allowed to return to Australia. Jerry recalls the discriminatory treatment at Sydney airport on his return from PNG in the 1950s:

It was apartheid then. I remember going to the education office to sit the exam to come to Australia. You had to pass an English test. I remember in the office of this white education officer. I must have stood there for an hour while he sat behind this desk. That was another thing. When I arrived in Australia at Kingsford Smith Airport, coloureds were separated from whites.

The perpetuation of such essentialist ideology of racial boundaries can further be highlighted by Sunny’s sense of difference experienced during his childhood in the 1960s:

I was always aware that I was different because in primary school I was picked out all the time. You got all these Italians. They were migrants themselves... You know little kids, they are very cruel, they call you “Ching Chong”, “slant eyes” and so on. You look very different. But Italians don’t look all that different from Aussies. The Chinese were very different, straight away and you get segregated. So I knew I was different from primary school.

While it is not possible to conclude that Italians or other Australians of European descent are

exempt from being viewed through a prism of otherness in White Australian society, these excerpts do highlight that the intensity of difference from the mainstream society is greater for those of non-European appearance. This is largely due to the effect of racial sentiments in the period of the White Australia Policy. Although there was a change to the ethnic composition of the Australian population that led to the alteration of settlement policy from one of open racism through the White Australia Policy to an official policy of pluralism through the multicultural policy in a short period of around 30 years, the perpetuation of the earlier racial discourse that defined the nation and ethnic boundaries continues to impact on the experiences of long-established Chinese communities today.

## Western Hierarchical Stratification

The fixity of social perceptions often leads to the pigeonholing of identities into predefined boxes, which does not reflect reality (Pickering 2001). Jerry expresses his frustration at the evaluative forms of labelling impinged upon him by others in his daily life:

I noticed that whenever I go to parties, dinners, theatre with a group of people and tell my Western friends about the event, they would all ask, “Were they Chinese?” and that’s a very strange question. I don’t see the relevance of the background of what company I keep. Then when I told them that my parents had moved to Chatswood into the nursing home, the first thing they asked was “Oh, are they all Chinese?” and that really puzzles me. That means they put me into a box, C for Chinese or whatever... I also organised this old boy’s reunion for ten of us plus their wives at a French restaurant in Balmain. So out of 20 people there were only three Asians, me, my cousin and her husband. I told my other Western friends about the night with my high school friends but they still say to me, “How are your Chinese friends?” It wasn’t a Chinese night, it was an old boys’ night but their emphasis was your “Chinese” friends...

Common to my informants’ experiences is that no matter how “Australian” or “Westernised” they may feel, their physical Chinese appearance is always a definite racial marker. The stereotypical

identification involves a process of distancing the designated through the construction of difference. In this way, Chineseness is often involuntarily forced upon them by the wider Western society. Dianne expresses the impossibility of being a “real” Australian because of the way she looks:

Being Australian means being able to go out into society and not to be judged by your looks, which is difficult because you can't change the way you look. I can go out there and be an Australian. I can act like an Australian, I can talk like an Australian, and I know all the traditions of Australians, but when you look at it from an Australian's perspective, I guess I'm not an Australian because of the way I look.

It is important to understand that cultural identity attains its significance by relational positioning such that a person's identity will vary depending on the context and function of questions posed to their identity (Hawkes 1992). As such, although my informants may perceive themselves as Australian, they are still continually viewed through a prism of otherness which reinforces their ethnicity. The importance of such reinforcement by others is further articulated by Rob's explanation of his preference for a Chinese person as his children's marriage partner:

... even though I wouldn't mind my children marrying whoever, it would be nice if they could maintain their Chinese looks. Their cousins already look Australian, they are looking that look so people won't treat them as Chinese. If no one is going to treat you as Chinese, then you won't feel you are Chinese!

Although physical characteristics as a source of identification are definitely problematic, the point is that the negotiation of Chineseness is unavoidably associated with “looks”.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that individuals themselves are caught within the authentication process. The internalisation of difference through physicality can be highlighted by Dianne when she tries to define her own identity:

See, if I say, I'm Chinese, I'm not really Chinese because I was born in Australia, so I'm embracing more of the Australian qualities like the culture

and whatever. So if I say I'm Australian then I think to myself I'm not Australian because I don't look like your typical Australian!

Ethnic identity thus is often reinforced by appearance as cross-cultural borders cannot be easily transgressed because of the underlying process of othering through difference and sameness. This leads to externalisation of those who do not fit into the dominant group.

To further illustrate the immutability of racial constructs, all informants express the view that when questioned by others about their origin, “Australia” never seems to be an acceptable answer and its rejection reveals at once that the question is not about hometowns. Sean's encounter was typical of my informants' experiences:

When people ask, “Where are you from?” If I say “I am from Australia” they will say “no no no”, then I say “Oh you mean I am Chinese ‘coz I look different?”

Sean's agitation about the label placed on him highlights the intensity of the hegemonic construction of racial imageries by the wider society. Such dismissal of one's proclaimed identity by others reveals the anxieties that motivate identity politics. The repeated question almost implies, “you couldn't be from here”, which equates non-whites with aliens (Lee 1999). Ang (2001, p. 29) describes these inclinations of specificity as “the disturbing signals for the impossibility of complete integration (or perhaps naturalisation is a better term), no matter how much I (pragmatically) strived for it”. Ethnic identity is reinforced by external appearance as cross-cultural borders cannot be easily transgressed, which alerts us to the underlying process of otherness through differences.

Moreover, as Pickering (2001) maintains, those that stand out as being different from the majority are turned into a spectacle, an exhibit and even a source of entertainment. Vera's recollection of continuous racial encounters points to this:

You know people would just yell out at you the usual things about your physical appearance or tell you to go back to where you came from and that sort of stuff. It always stuck to my mind. It was very upsetting. Although it didn't happen that often, but it was more than enough!

Racialised collectivities are often stratified within a broader social spectrum in which stereotypes are often imposed by the dominant groups. The current obsession to emphasise Western hegemonic discourse to all racial questions is very much an outgrowth of post-colonial theories. To confront Chineseness as a theoretical problem, it is not sufficient to only point to the Western ascriptions as such. In other words, the theorisation on Chineseness would be incomplete without a problematisation of Chinese identity as understood by in-group members within the broad framework of Chinese diasporic studies. As Gilroy (2004) asserts, there is an urgent need for a change in the social understanding of race, embodiment and human specificity. Therefore, a broader context of social identification through dialectics of sameness and difference needs to be considered in the politics of recognition.

### In-group Hierarchical Stratification

While Ang (2001, p. 30) maintains the collectivised notion of “Chineseness” has been continually re-constructed as a result of the lingering dominant hegemony of the Western culture, the process of authentication which inevitably impacts on the hierarchical stratification of identity is also shaped by the action of in-group members. For a number of informants who identify with being Chinese, the continual inquiries into their origin by in-group members, particularly when travelling into China, highlight that an essentialist paradigm based on physicality is also deeply embedded within the Chinese diasporic world. The continuous questioning of Mary’s identity by Chinese in Hong Kong highlights such phenomena:

I knew that I was different from other people because people would ask me, “Where are you from? What nationality are you?” and all that sort of thing. And I just used to take it for granted that I was Chinese, but when they used to ask me—they couldn’t tell what I was sometimes! I thought that was a bit queer, because I just automatically thought I was Chinese, but even last week somebody said, “You don’t look Chinese!” and I said “Oh, don’t I?” She was a lady from Beijing...

When I went to Hong Kong in 1958 a Chinese man on the plane walked by and he said, “Are you Philippino?” He went through a lot of other nationalities because he didn’t know what I was and in the end I just said, “Sydney”... So, I think the best answer is to say you’re Australian with Chinese roots.

Under the Western hegemonic construction of Chineseness, subsequent generations who have stereotypical oriental features would be generically labelled as “Chinese” by Western observers. As Mary explains, in Sydney she just takes for “granted” that she is Chinese. However, as illustrated, the physical marker of Chineseness invariably changes for diasporic Chinese living in different localities. Those, like Mary, who are of mixed descent—whose “looks” are located in a zone of “in-betweeness”—become a source of spectacle. As Gilroy (2004, p. 106) explains, “to have mixed is to have been party to a great betrayal. Any unsettling traces of hybridity must be exercised from the tidy, bleached-out zones of impossibly pure culture”. Ethnic identity is thus reinforced by external appearance as cross-cultural borders cannot be easily transgressed. Mary’s experience highlights that the underlying process of otherness perpetuates not only within Western discourse, but the action of in-group members also shapes their own social hierarchy.

Jerry’s experience in Beijing further highlights this process of othering. His experience of in-group judgment is similar to Work’s (2001, p. 19) autobiographical essay on her inability to speak Chinese. They both feel stupefied because they are unable to meet the cultural expectation that a Chinese-looking person must be able to speak Chinese:

Living in Beijing made me ashamed. Sometimes I’d go to the restaurant or the coffee shop with a few white people, say some colleagues from work. The waiter would come straight to me with the menu and then the white person. The *egg*<sup>7</sup> is so

<sup>7</sup>Egg is a metaphor for Westerners who are knowledgeable about the Chinese culture which includes the ability to speak and write Chinese. The metaphor is based on the stereotypical colour of racial groupings; egg white on the outside and the yellow yolk inside implies Westerners who are identified as “white” are actually Chinese (yellow) internally.



fluent that the waiter takes a double look at me because I can't speak Mandarin properly. So I am the *banana*<sup>8</sup> and my white colleague is the egg. So embarrassing... I felt I was in no man's land.

From this excerpt, it is evident that a "white" person's competence in Chinese is viewed as an index to an existential value of a "Chinese" person. Such construction of Chineseness is established through not only a system of values that arises with Westernised ascriptions, but also in-group expectations. As Ang (2001) suggests, racial categories do not only exist outside a particular cultural context, but are also thoroughly framed by and within them as well. In this way in-group members also play an important role in establishing their own categorisation of identities.

Furthermore, Alcott and Mohanty (2006, p. 6) maintain cultural expectations may not necessarily be impinged upon only by others—individuals associated with a particular minority group may draw evaluative forms of labelling on themselves to enable a better understanding of the social world they inhabit. This is highlighted by the social experience of Daisy, a descendant of a prominent merchant who migrated to Australia in the 1850s. She was raised in a Westernised family where intermarriage continued through the generations. Although she is identified as only one-eighth Chinese and does not have stereotypical Oriental features, she still has a very strong connection with her Chinese heritage:

First and foremost I think of myself as Australian. I have a strong interest in the Chinese side of my family. I get on well with most Chinese people I meet. I'd say probably 80% of me think of myself foremost as Australian but the rest of me acknowledges and welcomes the Chinese element of my being.

Daisy explains that at times she feels that she is a "fake" Chinese, especially when she is

amongst "full-blooded Chinese" who look and speak Chinese. Self-ethnicisation in this case serves as the trigger of a prescribed Otherness whereby she is situated in a state of liminality between the "real" and "fake". As Ang (2001, p. 30) contends, discourses of ethnicity begin to proliferate as ethnic minorities begin to assert themselves in their stated desire to maintain their cultural identity.

### Negative Association with "Looking" Chinese

The accumulative impact of the impossibility of total integration into the Chinese or Western community and being a continuous source of spectacle often leads to a yearning for belonging. Within a social context, the rigid structure of identity means that people are either classified as a part of a social group through the notion of sameness or singled out as a stranger. Consequently, two distinct phenomena are developed which are especially pertinent during childhood years: negative association with being Chinese and gravitation towards the "Chinese" community. In the Australian context, which is predominately "white", Chinese appearance is often the source of negative segregation. The seeming impossibility of attaining a sense of sameness is expressed by Pete whose feelings are typical of most informants: "It's always there, on the level that is what you look like. People will always ask you where you come from. You never have an entire sense of being the norm". There is always a physical sign of difference interfering with their attempts of integration.

During childhood, where the formation of identities is at the primary stage of development, this sense of difference often becomes a confusing experience. Rob recalls that he always questioned himself whether it was his personality or his ethnicity that led to his rejection by his "Anglo-Australian" peers during his childhood. He admits that he deliberately tried to deny his identity by living (performing) a typical Australian way of life, "hanging out with his mates", so he

<sup>8</sup>Banana is a metaphor for Asians who speak and write English fluently and live a Western way of life. The metaphor is based on the stereotypical colour of racial groupings; yellow skin of the banana on the outside and white flesh inside implies Chinese who are identified as 'yellow' are actually very Westernised (white) internally.

could fit in. The need for belonging is also vividly illustrated by Vera:

...when I was like about six years old or something... for a few months I would stand up in front of the mirror and I would try to give myself a crease above my eye and to try be like everyone else at school and of course later found out it wasn't going to work. It's a very sad thing that I had to do that if you think about it!

These excerpts highlight, as children, the learning of difference often leads to a yearning for acceptance by the dominant groups.

For some the impossibility of completeness inevitably led to negative identification with being Chinese. Pete recalls his childhood experiences:

Being Chinese was only a negative identification coz when we grew up in Ryde there were no Asians. But if you go there now there are lots of Asians. All the migrants were Italian or Greeks. Most of them have now moved out. We were one of the few Chinese families. It was quite conspicuous. So you develop a negative identification. So you are Chinese because they call you "Ching Chong Chinaman" or something like this.

The consequence of such sense of difference and stigmatism led to their deliberate disconnection with the Chinese heritage and culture. This can be illustrated by Lilly who is one-eighth Irish. She displays defiance, almost a sense of renunciation about her Chinese background, and emphasises the Irish component of her ancestry. She claims that she has no interest in Chinese men, dislikes the loudness of the way Chinese people speak and sees herself as a "real Australian" except for her yellow skin, an incapable Chinese phenotypic identifier. Lily highlights the fondness of the natural blond strips in her hair:

My cousin's hair is darker than mine. Because mine sort of has this blonde through it, which I think possibly came from my great-grandmother! Mum's not pure black, obviously, with a Eurasian father...but I'm the one with the lightest...I like keeping it with the grey and stuff, because you can tell that it's still got the blonde through it. I really like the colour of the hair. It's great!

The emphasis on her European features suggests the proudness of her Irish background. However, at the same time, she has an interest

in Chinese history, associates with Chinese Australian community organisations and is at ease with the people of Chinese descent.

While the yearning for sameness with the majority may lead to negative association with being Chinese, an inherent social hierarchy of class and status are also important factors segregating long-established ABCs from other Chinese communities in Australia. Lily expresses the differences between different Chinese groups based on wealth:

Well, I'd have to say I'm an Australian-born Chinese. But I'd say I'm different from Chinese... We were from a poor family and have lived here for generations. So there's the rich recent migrants and the poor Australian-born Chinese. There's a difference... A different lifestyle... Well, most of the Chinese people went to university and things like that. I didn't go to university... Instead of going to university I just learnt it in life, really.

Lilly's remark about wealth and education suggests the conscious categorisation of herself—middle-aged single woman, relatively minimal education, low wage earner—within a social hierarchy. It seems possible that her cultural disassociation from her Chinese heritage would uplift her social status. This feeling may have perpetuated from the racist notion as maintained by Robbs (2003): that being Chinese meant that you were of a lower status in society in colonial Australia, although as Lilly stated, the status of Chinese nowadays has certainly improved. In the same manner, Rob also notes the difference between the varied categories of Chinese in Australia:

It is the pecking order. It depends if you are the ABCs who put themselves at the top or recent migrants who put themselves at the top and think that the ABCs are at the bottom. The reason they think that is because the recent migrants are financially successful, that's how they get in whereas most ABCs are just average Australians. There is no way you can consider me to be financially successful.

Furthermore, the adoption of colloquial terms such as "FOBs" (Fresh-Off-the-Boats) and "bananas" in the speech of some participants is evidence of an enduring sense of difference that segregates themselves from other Chinese/Asian groups.

A clear example can be highlighted by Bill's intensive disassociation of himself from other recent Asian migrants:

Do you know the term FOBs? Fresh-off-the-boat. I hate them to be honest with you, sorry to say this to you, but I mean all my Asian friends hate them. It's for example, the way they drive, they think they are still over in Asia, double parking all over the place, driving all over the places, crossing lanes! When I go to Cabramatta, for example, I see people spitting on the ground and especially the way that they talk to you, the rudeness! I hate foby cab drivers, the ones that can't speak the language and don't know where they are going...

Although there is acknowledgment of an "Asian" identity that is shared amongst his Asian friends, it is clear there that there are tensions and differences between groups within the so-called "Asian-Australian" community that keep them apart.

### Gravitation Towards "Chinese" Community

However, being identified as Chinese is not necessarily all negative. Some informants indicate that their Chinese identity can be positive and enriching and being Chinese is fundamental to group belonging. The substance of identity is based on the reality that individual security can only be attained in a social setting in which the security of one individual depends on the association with others. As Kuah-Pearce (2006, p. 224) points out, individuals look to the socialisation process where the self enculturates the norms of the particular group that they belong to. Thus as children, where the home is the most dominant environment, looking similar to siblings becomes an important aspect of gaining a sense of belonging. This is highlighted by Sarah who is of mixed heritage<sup>9</sup>:

My siblings looked more Chinese and I looked less Chinese than everybody from my real or my adopted family. I am the only one who doesn't look Chinese. They all looked more Chinese. So as a matter of fact I wouldn't mind if I looked more Chinese at all. I have always wanted to look more Chinese because I looked different from my siblings.

As Chambers (1994) articulates, the need for a sense of belonging is often created by a fantasy and an imagination of a homogeneous physical reality. For Sarah, during her childhood, to look more Chinese implied a stronger sense of belonging and connections with her family.

Indeed the way in which identity is established largely depends on how the self and the other are interpreted. Thus, the subjective experience of any social group membership depends fundamentally on relations to members of other social groups. Janice highlights that the intensity of her sense of difference in relation to the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australians gradually led her to "gravitate back" to those who share a similar background:

I think our upbringing was very Asian-based. When I was at school there were hardly any Asians in my class, there were probably none! So all my friends were Australians. I have always realised that I ate different food, I look different but more importantly I had a different lifestyle. I have always moved towards an Asian lifestyle. Maybe they always like the beaches, sports, swimming and stuff like that—we weren't that style of people. Maybe we always had that problem because we looked Asian, there was a lot of name calling when we were growing up as there were not many Asians around. Basically we just stuck to ourselves, we just didn't mix very well...so when I got older I gravitated back to Asian people or even with Australia-born Chinese people who think similar.

For Dean, rather than a gradual gravitation to the Chinese community, difference from the dominant group was comfortably accepted as an advantage in the socialisation process:

It's not an issue now... It gives me among my Anglo friends a slant of difference on things... they would always ask me about Chinese food or places to go in China, this and that. It's not negative of anything.

A contributing factor leading to one sense of difference/sameness is located in complex notions of recognition and belonging where the central question arises as to how individuals interpret, construct and reconstruct themselves in the culture of which they are a part (Anderson 1999). As such, for my informants, the experience of group membership is located in the very definition of Chineseness (and Australianess since the significance of any identity depends on

<sup>9</sup>Eurasian.

the association with others, as identity construction is a relational process). The formation of identity involves entering a state of hybridity, such that their sense of identity is often situated in a liminal space as they negotiate and display who they are or how they want to be seen in different contexts.

Chineseness as a racialised collectivity is stratified within a broad social spectrum through the dialectics of sameness and difference. Certainly stereotypical characteristics such as certain physical attributes are often imposed by the dominant groups (within the Australian context they are Anglo-Celtic Australians) which subsequently become an important source of reinforcement of their Chineseness. However, it is also important to understand that essentialist ideologies are also the basis by which in-group members make sense of their identity. Concisely, the construction of difference and sameness is a mode of identification by others and the self. Identifying with a particular group brings with it security and acceptance; consequently, long-established Australian-born Chinese's sense of belongingness within the Australian context has led to differing associations with being Chinese, particularly those developed during the childhood years of their life course.

### **Authenticating Chineseness Through Language**

Ethnic identity is often authenticated by cultural attributes such as language and under the Western hegemonic discourse; it is an ideological demand and cultural expectation that one naturally speaks the ethnic language if one is to belong to an ethnic community. Because ethnic membership is widely believed to be a cultural and also biological matter, the presumed cultural trait of language is often seen as a natural part of an "imagined community" as it has always been a tradition of thought of the West (Anderson 1983). As Don, whose family has resided in Australia since the late 1800s, points out, "when people meet me at the church I go to, which is mainly Anglo-based, they may not say it straight away but after a while

they always say 'I expected a different accent'". Being Chinese is therefore inevitably tied up with knowledge of the Chinese spoken language (at the least), traditions and other cultural forms under the prevailing Western discourse of authenticity.

While Said (1978, p. 12) asserts that the dominant discourse is based on the relations between the "two halves"—East and West—hierarchical stratification exists within each entity. Central to the diasporic paradigm is that Chineseness is not a fixed content: as Ang (1998, p. 225) puts it, "be it racial, cultural, or geographical—but operated as an open indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly negotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diasporas". As such, subsequent generations who are living in Australia cannot possibly be the same as Chinese living in China or in Germany. Neither are they the same as other Chinese ethnic groups such as Hong Kong and Taiwanese migrants living in Australia.

While such a paradigm rightly acknowledges that there are many different Chinese identities and not a unified one, references to "a larger Chinese identity"—a shared notion of Chineseness based on essentialised cultural attributes such as language—still serve as a collective organising principle of social categorisation. In this sense, language competency also often becomes the defining source of the hierarchical position of diasporic Chinese. Such a conception can be clearly illustrated by Sean in his categorisation of Chinese in Australia:

When I am referring to Chinese I don't really distinguish them on whether they were born overseas or born in Australia. When I think about Chinese I tend to think of ones who can speak Chinese reasonably well and associate with other Chinese. I don't really think of ones who can't speak English. I guess they don't enter my sphere of interaction because I can't interact with them. So they are mainly students here and those who were born here. But those who have forsaken their Chinese identity, I tend to stay away from them. And then there is the invisible group who speaks Mandarin, I can't communicate with them at all.

While there is a notion of a common Chinese community, differences between groups often

occur due to the dynamics of an individual's social network and local context. For Sean, while his categorisation of Chinese is based on language and social connections, it contradicts the wider diasporic imagination of Chineseness that one must speak Chinese to be Chinese. The disjunctures of the shifting currents of discourses to Chineseness often lead to profoundly ambivalent experiences for those caught in between. The experience of informants in this study testifies to this. While they are often acknowledged specifically as "Australian-born Chinese" which indicate the variation from the common collective "Chinese" community in Australia, they are nevertheless implicated by the discourses of Chineseness (commonly read as recent migrants from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong).<sup>10</sup> Jenny finds "being Chinese" often involves a mixture of emotions of alienation and rejection. She recalls an incident in her childhood that highlights the way in which her identity as Chinese is enduringly framed by others:

I think it was when I was 14 or 15, someone said to me, and this was my Western friend, she said "Sometimes I forget that you are Chinese"... This was sort of like, "Oh, I wouldn't think you were Chinese!" It made me think twice. "Isn't it a weird thing to say", I thought. It made me notice.

Such feelings of alienation were largely a consequence of the way in which her identity was imposed by the Western hegemonic imagination of Chinese. Yet at the same time, feelings of rejection are further implicated by in-group Chinese. She expresses her feelings of being unable to speak fluent Chinese:

Now that I can't speak Chinese, I think it is important. Before I didn't think it was quite important. I realise that it is part of history and because I look Chinese everyone assumes you can speak Chinese, but I can't. So everyone is a bit shocked. So I kind of feel that I should because people expect me to, even amongst the Chinese. Also, most of my cousins can speak some Cantonese if not quite well—they can hold a conversation. I can only hold five words.

Ethnic language retention is often seen as an authentication of ethnicity, and as Ang (2001) rightly maintains, for those who "look" Chinese, regardless of their generational distance from China, the social expectation is that they must speak Chinese. Yet it needs to be highlighted that such essentialist ideology is not only a consequence of the Western hegemonic discourse within the Chinese community; essentialised qualities also exist. The intersection of such dynamic conditioning of Chineseness in different contexts and variations of discourses is the source of ambivalent experiences for diasporic Chinese.

### Western Inscriptions of Chineseness

The Literature on diasporas maintains that the collectivised notion of "Chinese" is continually constructed and re-constructed as a result of the enduring hegemony of the Western culture (see Chow 1998; Ang 2001). As Kibria (1998) points out, the distinguishing role of racial markers such as language, is that they reflect relations of power; in particular, the ability of the dominant group to construct and impose identities upon others. As such, for ethnic minorities in the West, their identities are often subjected to the mainstream imposition of non-Western representations. Chow (1998) highlights that Western imposition of identity often affirms its moral supremacy by way of stereotypical ethnic and national labels. Being Chinese, in the West, is often tied to an authentication process—one must possess qualities that originated from China. As Ang (2001, p. 30) asserts, "Chinese identity becomes confined to essentialist notions of Chineseness, the source of which can only originate from China, to which the ethnicised Chinese subject must adhere to acquire the stamp of authenticity". Thus, one's ability to speak Chinese often becomes an external indicator of their Chineseness, as Jenny explains, "because I look Chinese everyone assumes you can speak Chinese".

While Chinese language competency is perceived as an evaluative form of Chineseness, a

<sup>10</sup>The conception of such difference is captured by Rodney: "I actually like the term Australian-born Chinese. It signifies that I am not recently off the boat!"



lack of English skills is also seen as an existential index denoting inherent notions of supremacy. Jane, whose family has resided in Australia since the late 1800s, highlights such phenomena:

When people look at me, they think I am really Chinese. But when I open my mouth and say something they are surprised to know that I have an Australian accent. If I spoke on the phone and didn't give my name, they wouldn't know I am Chinese.

Such evaluative forms of labelling and cultural expectations are, as Ang (2001) contests, a result of the lingering dominant hegemony of the Western culture. Even when access into the mainstream society is achieved, the conventional simplification and stereotyping of ethnic subjects linger. The pervasiveness of the Western imagination of being Chinese can be further illustrated through Vera's experiences in Europe:

You get more problems over there because obviously they look at your face. I remember when I studied French for a year there was an Italian student asking me where I came from and I said I'm from Australia. And she's like "You can't be from Australia, what's wrong with you?" and I said I was born in Australia... This was about 10 years ago... I had the same thing in England too with these white South Africans, they were just crazy! They would be surprised that I could use a knife and a fork!... So they sort of label you. Even in Sydney, they often immediately make such judgments. Unless they hear me speak, they think I'm a recent migrant. But once they hear you talk, they just speak to you normally.

Through a system of values that arises with Western ascriptions, the index to existential value of a Chinese person is often based on a person's competence in English (Ang 2001, p. 30). To this extent, the lack of knowledge of the Chinese culture and the lack of mainstream host culture become the pre-eminent basis for establishing the foundation of a Chinese identity for long-established Chinese communities in Australia.

### In-group Inscriptions of Chineseness

While the hegemony of Western ascriptions is intimately felt by diasporic Chinese living in the West, the intensity of in-group ascriptions should not be underestimated. Within the Chinese

diasporic universe, those who are able to speak and write Chinese are differentiated from those who can only speak; those that can only speak are differentiated from those who cannot; those who speak Mandarin are differentiated from those who speak other dialects. In this sense, the lingering pervasive hegemony of authenticity based on language performs functions as a mode of collective identity which has substantial impact on the hierarchical categorisation of diasporic Chinese.

One key aspect of the changing Australian demography concerns in-group variation of migrant populations which has undergone major transformations in recent decades due to reforms in migration policies and economic developments. In particular, the increased intake of skilled Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong and China in the last 20 years has led to an increase in first generation overseas-born migrants who have grown up in culturally different societies and are Chinese-literate. Their arrival has created greater in-group diversity among Chinese communities in Australia. This can be clearly highlighted by Ada who can speak Zhongshan—a form of Chinese dialect. While she can speak a form of the Chinese language, she is segregated from the main "Chinese" community made up of recent migrants from Hong Kong and China. When she married a "wealthy" Hong Kong-born migrant in Australia, her husband constantly reminded her not to speak in that "country-style accent" and to learn "proper Cantonese". He said in a well-educated Hong Kong family it was considered lowly to speak a rural dialect. The hierarchical system through the discourse of language clearly highlights the significant role of in-group ascriptions. Those caught in between the intersections of the changing conditions of Chineseness in different contexts are fraught with feelings of ambivalence.

In-group ascriptions can often be clearly felt when my informants visited Chinese-dominated places. Most felt stigmatised because they are not able to speak fluent Chinese. Jenny expresses her experience in Hong Kong:

In Hong Kong they are quite racist. I find a lot of people are quite rude to me because I can't speak Chinese. I think they can tell just from looking at

the way you dress that you are not from Hong Kong. You go into shops and stuff and they don't treat you very well. I feel I am looked down upon. I guess most of that is language.

Such sense of difference is often escalated when one steps onto the soil of China, which under the hegemonic discourse of authenticity, is the source of real Chineseness. Debra shares her experience in China:

There is this small part of me who is Chinese coz I can't deny my heritage. But I didn't have the language and didn't have any experience of it because it has been removed by two generations. If my parents had some experience of living in China and speaking Chinese, there would be a lot more connection. We were in fact looked down upon when we were in China because we didn't speak any Chinese, so I just didn't feel I was part of them.

Such sense of stigmatism was similarly felt by Jane when she visited China:

We felt left out, coz people would look at you and say, "How come you don't speak Chinese. You look Chinese" ... It made me feel inadequate that I didn't speak Chinese very well.

Language is socially accepted as an important system of signs for identifying the uniqueness of any culture which is crucial to cultural reclamation. Within the social context of the Chinese diaspora, individuals who cannot speak the Chinese language—which is seen as an existential index—are fraught with the feelings of guilt and inadequacy when coming to terms with their Chineseness. Jenny states:

I would like to go to China for tourist purposes. I would like to go back to where my parents' families are from but then I don't speak Chinese so I'd feel funny going back. I'd feel like I don't belong there coz I don't speak the language. It is not really undeserving or ungrateful but I would feel like I wasn't fully appreciating if I didn't know the language and not knowing a whole lot of history about it. It would be a wasted opportunity.

The persistence of the perception that being Chinese must entail all things that originated from China certainly has cultural relevance to the negotiation of Chineseness in the world. The lingering pervasive hegemony of authenticity creates a hierarchical classification that stratifies the position of diasporic Chinese.

Even within subsequent generational groups, authentication is also linked to the ability of speaking and writing Chinese. Sean recalls his feeling of superiority over other Chinese Australians when he travelled to China on a heritage tour which aimed to promote cultural awareness:

Actually my Chinese was one of the best out of all those who went on the tour. Some of them couldn't speak at all! I felt that was shocking! I felt it was a shame that they couldn't speak it. Normally I am very proud and want to be the best. But I didn't feel proud, I felt sadness really, for the ABC who couldn't speak the language. I felt I was lucky that I was raised to have this, at least this level of proficiency to at least get by.

For those who cannot "really" speak Chinese, the ability to speak a few words can be the source of segregation. Those who are recognised as Chinese but cannot speak the language are seen with shame and disappointment not only by the dominant groups of the West but also by in-group members. They often become a source of humiliation because of the presumed inability to connect with the Chinese culture. This highlights that racialised collectivities are stratified within a broader social spectrum, where stereotypical identities are often imposed by external and internal forces, each establishing a different hierarchy of identities.

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## Conclusion

This chapter examines the complex idea of "Chineseness" by engaging in a discourse of authenticity and recognition. Certainly, Chineseness is a negotiated, unstable assemblage of perceptions and the meaning and practice of "being Chinese" varies in different social contexts and locations. Yet the notion of Chineseness—however one may define it—is still crucial to making sense of the daily life of long-established Australian-born Chinese. During the years of the White Australia Policy, Chinese migrants were excluded from the political, social and economic life of mainstream Australia as such they relied strongly on cohesion of the family, in-group marriage, language and a strong collective conscience for social

and economic survival. However, the policy moved from White Australia to Multiculturalism. With increasing Chinese population in Australia, Chinese Australian communities are now situated in new dynamic socio-cultural spaces where they form their sometimes common, at other times dissimilar, experiences and self-perceptions. The different perceptions of Chineseness provide the criteria used to ascertain the social positioning of diasporic Chinese.

Moreover, the persistence of the in-group marriage pattern of earlier generations has implications on the visual manifestation of physicality, acting as an important source of reinforcement of Chineseness. Through a racial discourse, I highlighted that regardless of personal history or how strongly cultural identities may be grounded in Australia, my informants whose families have resided in Australia for over three generations are still continually seen through a prism of otherness. In this manner, essentialist qualities prescribed through racial attributes form the basis by which subsequent generations construct difference and sameness. The heading "You can't be one of us because you look different" precisely describes their common expression of never being able to become a "real" Australian. In an Anglo-Celtic dominated society, not only do recent migrants find it impossible to achieve complete integration, long-established ABCs who "look" Chinese also experience similar difficulties.

While racial characteristics based on physical attributes are often imposed by Western ascriptions, it must be noted that the hierarchical stratification of identity is also shaped by the action of in-group members. Because they "look" Chinese, they are subjected to the cultural expectation of being able to speak Chinese by both parties. Those who do not meet the expectations are made to feel shame and embarrassment. This demonstrates that the construction of difference and sameness is a mode of identification by others and the self.

The accumulative impact of the impossibility of total integration into the Chinese or Western community and being a continuous source of

spectacle often lead to a yearning for belonging. Consequently, two distinct phenomena were pertinent during their childhood years: negative association with being Chinese and gravitation towards the "Chinese" community. Particularly prominent in such longing was during the childhood and adolescence years as young people are especially susceptible to social and cultural influences which play a major role in shaping an individual's identity. The accommodation of difference was fundamental in ensuring a sense of security for subsequent generations.

The social stratification and racial hierarchical constructions of "being Chinese" were further explored through the cultural attribute of language. Although western projections have a tendency to prescribe stereotypical labels of "real" or "unreal" Chinese based on one's ability to speak the language, in-group members also played an important role in establishing their own hierarchy of identities. For the illiterate Westerner, those who can speak any form of Chinese are deemed "true" Chinese; for a Cantonese-speaking Chinese, only those who can speak Mandarin are deemed "authentic"; for a Mandarin-speaking Chinese, only those who speak Beijing Mandarin are "pure" Chinese. For long-established ABCs, variations in the fluency of Chinese led to hierarchies of Chineseness being formed as they positioned themselves against the different groups of Chinese migrants in Australia. A sense of "superiority" or "inferiority" to others varied depending on the perceived "authenticity" of their Chineseness.

While it is obvious that there are different sub-ethnic Chinese groups, the fixity of perceptions based on essentialist characteristics often demarcates Chineseness into an absolute oppositioning of authentic and inauthentic, real and fake. The fact is that many people still naturalise the "other" according to fixed perceptions and as such while physical and racial traits are social constructs they still function as tools for collective identification. This is highlighted by the way in which all my informants continually position themselves relative to specific collectivities such as Chinese, Chinese Australians, Australian-born Chinese, Eurasians, etc. Through relative

positioning of oneself from other categories, subsequent generations designate their sense of Chineseness and make sense of who they are. This relationship is a “configuration of power” and is reinforced by the collective persistence of cultural and racial markers. Such designated boundaries become an authoritative stamp of authenticity which consolidate a racial hierarchy of Chineseness stratifying the social positions of those who claim to be “Chinese”. As such, rather than simply celebrate or dismiss the various uses of the collective Chinese identity, this chapter has examined Chineseness through racial and cultural discourses to gain an understanding of how sequential generations construct and deal with social determinants which are “real” to everyday life. This has provided an explanation of how and why identities are problematic and where and why they are empowering, thus highlighting the validity of Chineseness as an important category of identification and analysis. Let me make it clear that I am not disputing the problematics of bounded and mutually exclusive identities—it is only its reductionism which I contest. The ways in which individuals negotiate and construct identities within preset boundaries need to be fully acknowledged, retained and

explored in their own ramifications. In doing so, their insights will allow a greater understanding of the nature of power relations of “difference” and “sameness” operating through the social construction of race within Australian society and the wider Chinese diaspora.

In summary, while they have acquired a broad range of symbolic cultural capital of the Australian society and have maintained values and morals of the Chinese culture, they are still unable to totally fit into either community because of the hierarchical stratification by Western and in-group Chinese diasporic ascriptions. As such, essentialist ideologies are not only a consequence of the Western hegemonic discourse, within the Chinese community that is segregated largely by the differing cultural capital of recent and old migrants, stratification based on essentialised qualities also exists. This demonstrates that the prevailing discourse of authenticity based on essentialised attributes continues to be a “real” factor in determining group belonging despite the delegitimisation of identity in postmodern discourses. This provides an accurate basis for discussing the long-term effects of migration on individuals’ attitudes to Australian society which have important ramifications on the maintenance of social cohesion.

## Appendix: Biographical Details of Informants

### Biographical details of female informants

Pseudonym	Migratory generation <sup>a</sup>	Year of birth	Place of birth	Marital status	Intermarriage on informant's family line	Occupation	Highest level of educational attainment <sup>b</sup>
Ada	5	1940s	Sydney	Divorced	Yes	Admin Assistant; Spiritual Healer	Diploma
Daisy	4	1950s	Rural NSW	Single	Yes	Lawyer	Bachelor Degree
Debra	4	1950s	Sydney	Married	No	Housewife	Graduate Diploma
Dianne	4	1950s	Sydney	Married	Yes	Librarian	Bachelor Degree
Jane	3	1940s	Sydney	Divorced	No	Admin Assistant	Year 12
Janice	4	1960s	Sydney	Married	No	Bank Teller	Year 12
Jenny	6	1970s	Sydney	Defacto	Yes	Admin Officer	Masters Degree
Lilly	4	1940s	Rockhampton (QLD)	Widowed	No	Market Researcher	Year 12
Mary	3	1930s	Rural NSW	Widowed	Yes	Housewife	Year 12
Sarah	3	1940s	Sydney	Divorced	Yes	Quality Control Auditor	Year 12
Vera	3	1960s	Sydney	Divorced	No	Website Development Manager	Bachelor Degree

### Biographical details of male informants

Pseudonyms	Migratory generation <sup>a</sup>	Date of birth	Place of birth	Marital status	Intermarriage on informant's family line	Occupation	Highest level of educational attainment <sup>b</sup>
Bill	5	1970s	Sydney	Single	Yes	Recruitment Officer	Year 12
Dean	4	1970s	Sydney	Single	No	Equity Finance Analyst	Bachelor Degree
Don	4	1950s	Sydney	Married	No	Librarian	Graduate Diploma
Jerry	3	1940s	Sydney	Single	No	Retrenched Government Officer	Matriculation
Pete	4	1950s	Sydney	Single	Yes	Researcher	PhD
Rob	5	1950s	Sydney	Married	Yes	Librarian	Graduate Diploma
Rodney	3	1960s	Richmond (QLD)	Single	No	Chartered Accountant	Masters Degree
Sean	4	1970s	Sydney	Married	No	Australia Post Officer	Bachelor Degree
Sunny	4	1960s	Sydney	Single	No	Semi-retired Businessmen; Missionary	Graduate Diploma

<sup>a</sup>It has to be noted that definitions based on generation and birthplace classification can never be totally clear-cut as there will always be cases situated in zones of liminality. Many of the early generations were sojourners such that they travelled back and forth between China and Australia and subsequent generations may have been born in both countries. Classification of “Migratory generation” represents the number of generations an informant’s family has departed from China and calculated from the side of the family which has had the longest residence in Australia.

<sup>b</sup>The highest educational attainment of all informants was completed in Australia.



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# Families in the Chinese Diaspora: Women's Experience in Transnational Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese Immigrant Families in Canada

9

Guida C. Man

Many social science studies on ethnic and immigrant families have previously adopted a theory of the family which characterizes ethnic and racial communities as homogeneous and static, and immigrant families as monolithic structures which are traditional and patriarchal. More recent debates have contested this conceptualization. Research on immigrant and racialized families have found them to be fluid and dynamic, and they encompass diverse forms and structures within a specific racialized or ethnicized community as well as across different racialized or ethnicized groups (Calliste 2003; Man 2001; Momirov and Kilbride 2005).

Studies on Canadian immigrant families indicates an increasing prevalence of transnational familial processes among various immigrant groups (see e.g., Das Gupta 2005/2006; Man 1995, 1997; Waters 2001; Tsang et al. 2003). The term “transnational families” is fairly new, and it has emerged with the paradigmatic shift of migration being defined as a process of transnationalism, subsumed under the larger processes of globalization. Transnational families evolved with the mass migration of people from one country to another. Immigrants typically maintain multi-stranded social relations with their home country as well as their country of settlement

(Schiller et al. 1995). Contemporary transnational processes have evolved with the increasing division of labor internationally, new forms of culture, the devolution of national and international citizenship policies and practices, the rapid transformation in communication technologies, and faster and diverse modes of transportation systems (Levitt 2001). Similarly, transnational families shape and are shaped by these globalization processes.

Some social scientists, however, have argued that transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, but is in fact a feature of settler and migrant societies. Members of transnational families brought with them their practical know-how, knowledge of the social, economic, and political processes of their homeland, gender ideologies, social practices, and cultural norms to their host countries, which are reinforced and maintained through their continuous communications and networks with family members in the home country.

Traditional Chinese family is popularly believed to be composed of a large, complex, patriarchal structure which houses several generations and extended family members. This familial structure is deemed to be the norm for Chinese families until late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Li 1998, p. 61). In fact, the feasibility of sustaining a large family unit is only economically viable for the gentry, but not for the majority of the population comprised of peasants, who maintained small family units (Ho 1965). Chinese diasporic families in Southeast Asia were small, nuclear units rather than extended

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family structures (Hoe 1976). In Canada, where many Chinese immigrants have settled since the 1880s, the formation of Chinese families and communities has historically been shaped by changing social, political, and economic processes. Hence Chinese familial structures and practices in Canada change at different historical junctures.

Chinese immigration started increasing in the early 1970s after the points system of the immigration policy was introduced in 1967, when the Chinese were allowed to enter the country as other groups. By 1987, the Chinese had become the largest immigrant group entering the country. In 2001, Chinese population exceeded one million for the first time in Canadian history. Many Chinese immigrants came to Canada under the “independent class” immigrant category, as skilled workers or entrepreneurs. The majority of the newcomers settled in either Toronto or Vancouver (Chui et al. 2005, p. 26).

A 1991 survey conducted in the Richmond area of Vancouver, for example, found that 40% of the Chinese from Hong Kong lived in transnational arrangements (SUCCESS 1991). This data is further substantiated by studies on Chinese immigrants which found occurrences of transnational practices among Chinese immigrant families (Lam 1994; Man 1995, 1997; Pe-Pua et al. 1998). There is a growing literature which addresses globalization and the transnational migration of Chinese immigrants, and this literature focuses particularly on gender differences (see e.g. Man 2002, 2006; Kobayashi et al. 2006).

In this chapter, I use empirical studies to illustrate Hong Kong and mainland Chinese immigrant women’s experience in Canada. I explore how these women respond to the contradictory demands of their work in the labor market as well as their work at home. I demonstrate that Chinese immigrant women adopt various transnational familial practices as a strategy to accommodate their productive processes in the public sphere and their reproductive work in the private sphere—in the nurturing of children, and the caring for members of the family in different

geographical spaces—for the survival and continuation of Chinese families and communities in the context of globalization and economic restructuring in the new country.

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## History of Chinese Families in Canada

In the Canadian context, transnational familial arrangements have existed in diasporic Chinese communities since Chinese immigrants first came to British Columbia in the late 1850s in response to the gold rush. Between 1876 and 1884, over 17,000 Chinese were admitted to British Columbia to work on the railway and the mines in the development and expansion of the country. The Chinese were considered to be one of the undesirable racial groups. They were tolerated as long as there was a demand for their cheap labor, but they did not have citizenship rights and were discouraged from bringing their families with them. The Canadian state started imposing institutionalized discriminatory policies on the Chinese to stem their entry when Chinese cheap labor was no longer in demand. In 1886, a head tax of \$10 was levied on the Chinese laborers who wished to enter Canada. By 1903,<sup>1</sup> a series of increments in the head tax to curtail further Chinese immigration culminated in the exorbitant amount of \$500 a Chinese laborer entering Canada had to pay. When this measure was not

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<sup>1</sup>According to “An Act Respecting and Restricting Chinese Immigration” (Colonial Office to Foreign Office, London, FO 371/8003, 16 June 1922), “every person of Chinese origin, irrespective of allegiance, shall pay into the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Canada, on entering Canada, at the port or place of entry, a tax of five hundred dollars except (1) diplomatic corps or other government representatives, their suites, servants, consuls, and consular agents, (2) children born in Canada of parents of Chinese origins and who have left Canada for educational purposes or other purposes, and (3) merchants, their wives, and children, wives and children of clergymen, tourists, men of science and students. As well, no vessel carrying Chinese immigrants to any port in Canada shall carry more than one such immigrant for every 50 tons of its tonnage.”

effective in completely stopping Chinese immigration, the Chinese Exclusionary Act<sup>2</sup> which prohibited any Chinese immigration, was implemented from 1923 to 1947. As a result, virtually no Chinese was allowed to enter the country during that period.

Due to the sexist and racist environment, there were few jobs for single Chinese women except as slave girls for wealthy Chinese families or as prostitutes (Chan 1983). Furthermore, the high cost of the head tax ensured that single women were not able to come. Without the promise of a job, they simply could not afford to pay back the loan from their relatives for their journey over. Women typically came in as wives. However, few laborers could afford to pay the head tax for their wives and children to come. The imposition of the Chinese Exclusionary Act was effective in deterring poor Chinese laborers as well as Chinese women from coming into Canada to form families and proliferate. Chinese population in Canada was therefore contained.

Although the number of Chinese women in Canada remained small until the 1970s, studies have found them to be active members of the community both inside and outside the home. They were strong and nurturing mothers and supportive wives, working alongside their husbands in small family businesses such as Chinese laundry, restaurants, and grocery stores, as well as being active participants in the community, advocating

equality and social justice (see CCNC 1992; Nipp 1986; Adilman 1984). Chinese women's paid and unpaid labor was indispensable to the maintenance and continuance of Chinese businesses and for the economic survival of Chinese families.

Since many Chinese men who worked as indentured laborers in Canada could not afford to send their wives and children to come to Canada, they sent remittances to support their wives and children in China instead. Periodically, when the laborers had saved enough money, they would return to China for a visit. Many Chinese wives had to endure a lonely widow-like existence in China while their husbands lived in a bachelor society in Canada. Hence, transnational separate spheres of production and reproduction were created. This has had tremendous effect on Chinese family structures and community formation. Li (1998) provided data to demonstrate that as recent as 1951, there were almost 13,000 "separated" (or "transnational") families in the Chinese community in Canada, as compared to less than 30,000 "intact" families (Li 1998, p. 67, Table 4.4). Many of these separated families did not reunite until the 1970s when the married women and their children from China were able to join their husbands in Canada.

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## Research Methodology

The data for this chapter is derived from a research project entitled "Chinese immigrant women in Toronto: precarious work, precarious lives"<sup>3</sup>. I use a feminist methodology developed by Dorothy Smith (1987, 2005). Rather than treating Chinese immigrant women as objects of the study, I place them as the subject of the research and start from their actual,

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<sup>2</sup>According to Con et al. (1982, p. 141), the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 contained the following provisions: abolition of the head tax, students below university age were no longer admitted, only four classes of immigrants could enter Canada, all were categorized as temporary settlers. They were (1) university students; (2) merchants—defined as "one who devotes his undivided attention to mercantile pursuits, dealing exclusively in Chinese manufactures or produce or in exporting to China goods of Canadian produce or manufacture, who has been in such business for at least 3 years, and who has not less than \$2,500 invested in it. It does not include any merchant's clerk, tailor, mechanic, huckster, peddler, drier or curer of fish, or anyone having any connection with a restaurant, laundry or rooming-house"; (3) native-borns returning from several years of education in China; and (4) diplomatic personnel.

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<sup>3</sup>The research project entitled "Chinese Immigrant Women in Toronto: Precarious Work, Precarious Lives" was funded by an Atkinson Minor Research Grant (2004–2005) at York University and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Small Grant (2004–2005).

everyday world. Since an ordinary daily scene has “an implicit organization tying each particular local setting to a larger generalized complex of social relations” (Smith 1987, p. 153), the researcher’s task is to explore and explicate the social relations and social organization that have an impact on the subject’s world, but which are organized extra-locally in the historical, social, political, cultural, and economic spheres, and which are not necessarily visible to the subjects.

Focus group and individual interviews were conducted in the preferred dialect of the participants (i.e., Cantonese for the Hong Kong women, and Mandarin for the mainland women).

## The Sample

Immigrants enter Canada typically under three categories: family classes (foreign nationals sponsored by close relatives or family members in Canada), economic classes (people selected for their skills and ability to contribute to Canada’s economy, including skilled workers and business persons), and refugees. The emphasis of the Canadian immigration policy in recruiting skilled professionals to Canada has resulted in a high percentage of recent immigrants who are admitted under this category in recent years. For example, in 2005, economic-class immigrants constituted almost 60% of all immigrants coming to Canada, of which almost 50% were skilled workers, and 5% were business immigrants (CIC 2006, Table 3, p. 17).

This study focuses on Chinese immigrant women who were professionals (skilled workers) in their home country. Two groups of Chinese immigrant women were selected: from Hong Kong and from mainland China (People’s Republic of China). The two groups have lived in different social, political, and economic systems. Hong Kong immigrants were recent post-colonial subjects who had lived in a capitalist system under British rule for 99 years until 1997, when Hong Kong was returned to Chinese rule. Immigrants from mainland China, on the other hand, had lived under a fast-changing communist regime. In general, the Hong Kong immigrants tend to be more

affluent, and the mainland immigrants tend to be more highly educated.

The data were derived from two focus group interviews, and eleven individual in-depth interviews of Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong and mainland China. One focus group comprised four immigrant women from Hong Kong, and the other focus group comprised eight immigrant women from mainland China. In addition, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with seven mainland Chinese immigrant women and four immigrant women from Hong Kong.

All the women were married and had at least one child. Those from mainland China all had either a B.A. or M.A., while only half of the Hong Kong women had a B.A. Two had tertiary education. Those from Hong Kong were older, ranging from 29 to 53, while those from China ranged from 25 to 36.

I used a purposive sampling method. Chinese women from Hong Kong and mainland China who immigrated to Canada with their families between 1998 and 2004 were selected. The women in the focus groups were contacted through the assistance of a community agency, the Center for Information and Community Services, which services these immigrants. The women in the individual interviews were recruited by a snow-ball sampling method through various contacts. Each focus group interview lasted for 3 hours and 30 minutes, while each individual interview ranged from one to two hours. The focus group interviews as well as the individual interviews were taped, translated, and transcribed,

## Analysis

The Canadian immigration policy has adopted a universal point system since 1967, thus opening the country to non-white immigrants from “non-traditional” source countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and other European countries. The point system prioritizes those immigrants who are highly educated and skilled, as well as the business immigrants. In June 2002, the new Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) was introduced.



This act further privileged skilled workers, investors, and entrepreneurs. As a result, the majority of immigrants came into the country as skilled workers.

The reversion of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule in 1997 could be a strong driving force behind the movement of people and capital from Hong Kong to Canada; the primary reason of their immigration as narrated by the Hong Kong women was for their children's education. For the mainland Chinese women, many cited their reasons for immigration as follows: the desire to see places outside of China, the longing to experience other cultures, and the concern about children's education due to the severe competition in getting into good schools in China. Some of the women or their husbands had been working for international businesses in China, and they imagined a higher standard of living in the west. The women often mentioned that their husbands were the ones who initiated the move.

The women's narratives revealed the difficulties immigrant women encountered in the new country in juggling their work in the labor market and their work in the home. For the mainland Chinese women, difficulties in finding work which is commensurate with their qualifications result in their taking jobs with lower pay and status. This in turn impacts gender relations and household arrangements. The Chinese immigrant women resolve their conflicting demands by establishing separate transnational spheres of work and family through their transnational familial networks.

Feminist family scholars insist that structural processes in the public sphere have tremendous impact on the power relations and household division of labor in the private sphere. The devaluation of women's work in the paid labor force vis-à-vis that of men, coupled with the lack of institutional support in childcare facilities, has relegated women to be primarily responsible for household work (Waring 2006; Luxton and Reiter 1997; Fox 2001; Eichler 1997), thus perpetuating women's subordinate position in the family.

Individual woman's lives are therefore very much affected by conditions in the larger social, economic, and political processes. Their actual everyday living is not neatly separated into discreet spheres, rather, they are messy and unpredictable;

events and occurrences in their work life and family life are often integrally connected, entangled, and fused together.

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### **Contradictory Demands of Women's Work Inside and Outside the Home**

Feminist scholars have long asserted women's dual workload at home and in the labor market, and the difficulties women experience in confronting contradictory demands. In Canada, since the 1980s, social, political, and economic processes have further exacerbated women's work inside and outside the home. Successive neo-liberal and neo-conservative governments at both federal and provincial levels have opted for a lean government and the reduction of public spending. They adopted policies and practices favoring restructuring, privatization, and deregulation which aggravated labor market conditions by lowering wages and fostering precarious employment (Vosko 2006). As a result of the polarizing effects of gender, race, and class, the situation has been dire for immigrant and minoritized women. Research studies found that immigrant women have higher unemployment rates than Canadian-born women (Boyd 1992; Badets and Howatson-Leo 2000) and that Chinese immigrant women are susceptible to underemployment or unemployment (Man 2002, 2004a, b; Preston and Man 1999; Salaff 2000). Minoritized women and immigrant women of color were often being channeled into "secondary" employment. Many remained in such positions throughout their career (Hiebert 1997).

The women in my study echoed the difficulties that other immigrant women have voiced, i.e., employers' reluctance to recognize immigrant women's qualifications and experience from their own countries, the requirement of "Canadian experience," and racism in the labor market (George 1998; Man 1997). Like other minoritized immigrant women, these Chinese immigrant women who have worked in professional or administrative positions in Hong Kong or in mainland China encountered considerable difficulties in finding employment which is commensurate with their qualifications. Once in Canada, these

highly educated, skilled immigrants are not able to reinsert themselves in the Canadian labor market due to the lack of recognition of international credentials and experience.

Skilled immigrant women from mainland China often have to take up menial positions, with low pay and no job security. Previous studies on immigrant women have found that the lack of time or finances to upgrade oneself, whether in English language courses or in the recertification process, often lead to their languishing in low-paying positions for a prolonged period, making it even more difficult for them to get out of the precarious position they are in. The necessity to sustain the household economically means the wife typically has to remain in the menial position to support the family while the husband pursues his recertification process. The wife's own career goal is being truncated or delayed.

Social science scholars have confirmed that precarious employment is a highly gendered and racialized phenomenon (Cranford and Vosko 2006; de Wolff 2006; Das Gupta 2006). Studies have found that women, immigrants, refugees, and people of color are most vulnerable to precarious employment (Galabuzi 2001; Ornstien 2000). Precarious employment refers to employment which has low wages, high health risks, atypical employment contracts, no or limited benefits or security (Vosko et al. 2003). Precarious work has existed for a long time, but it takes various shapes and forms in different space and time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Canada, precarious employment was the norm, particularly among immigrant and racialized minorities (Arat-Koc 1999; Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Calliste 1993). More recent research has also shed light on the increasing prevalence of women in part-time, contingent, and flexible labor (Armstrong 1996; Luxton and Reiter 1997).

The mainland women often refer to their menial, precarious jobs as well as their spouses' employment as "labor jobs," i.e., blue collar jobs which require physical ability rather than mental acuity. "Labor jobs" in China, as in Canada, are stigmatized and relegated to those with little education or resources. For these university-educated middle-class women who had worked for some time in their home country as professionals and

skilled workers, they were ashamed of their diminished status, and lamented their lost class position. But pragmatically, they also realized that they had to engage in this work to survive, and rationalized that since all their friends in Canada encounter the same employment difficulties, and had experienced similar loss of status, they resolved to endure the present situation, but were determined to strive for a better future for themselves and their children. Nonetheless, they did confide that they would never do this kind of work in China nor admit to family or friends in China of the kind of work they do in Canada for fear of losing face or be labeled as a failure.

For many new immigrants, their job search is often hampered by employer's requirement of "Canadian experience." Such requirement has subjected mainland immigrants to take on any menial work in order to acquire "Canadian experience." A mainland woman who was an English lecturer at a university in China described with a sense of humor her first job in Canada as an assembly line laborer in a garment factory:

I worked as a laborer. Have you seen Chaplin's movie *Modern Times*? I worked as an assembly line worker, in charge of piercing buttons. I told my husband I had been piercing buttons for the whole day, like Charles Chaplin in *Modern Times*. If I know someone piercing buttons, we can talk for long, as we have something in common. [MLI: N2]

The Hong Kong women fared slightly better. They were able to find employment through their network of friends. These positions were often in businesses owned by Hong Kong entrepreneurs in the ethnic enclave. The changing of the Canadian immigration policy in 1967 to a point system, coupled with the fear of political instability in Hong Kong at the time, has led to a deluge of Hong Kong immigrant professionals and entrepreneurs coming to Canada since the early 1970s. As a result, the Hong Kong Chinese community in Canada is well established. As well, many Hong Kong immigrants were brought up through the British colonial educational system and therefore were familiar with the English language. As this Hong Kong women told me:

I got the job through networking. It was my brother's neighbor who owned the factory. It was a

clerical job in a factory owned by a Hong Kong guy. I worked for 13 months and gained Canadian experience. In 1998, my husband finally decided to join us. My husband tried very hard to find a job. He was very lucky that he got his job after his first interview in Canada. And he stayed in the same company since then. [HKFG: N4]

Immigrant women also encounter difficulties in regard to childcare and household work. In all industrialized countries, despite the fact that there is significant participation of married women in the labor force, women are still primarily responsible for housework and childcare. There is strong cultural ideology and structural support reinforcing the social construction of womanhood that defines a woman by her child-rearing and domestic abilities. The myth of mothering involves the belief that women are naturally and instinctively mothers (Hall 2006; Glenn et al. 1994) and that it is done as a labor of love, and not considered as work (Luxton 1980). The shortage of regulated, affordable childcare facilities for working mothers in Canada further exacerbates women's work. Since the 1980s, the hollowing out of the welfare state and the dismantling of social safety net has foisted health-care and childcare onto the family and the unpaid work of women. Similar to other women, the Chinese immigrant women bear the bulk of the day-to-day housework and caring responsibilities, while their husbands are only marginally involved in such tasks (Weber 1994; Gelfand and McCallum 1994; Man 1997). Despite the efforts of feminist activists and childcare advocates, successive neo-liberal and neo-conservative governments have ignored women's needs and have pushed childcare back to the private sphere to be dealt with by individual parents, usually the mothers (Luxton and Reiter 1997; Waring 1999; Luxton 1990; Michelson 1988; Lero 2003). As a result, women are constantly juggling the contradictory demands of paid work and domestic labor (Baker 2001).

Similarly, in mainland China and in Hong Kong, publicly funded childcare is inadequate. Chinese women are able to procure assistance in childcare and housework from extended family members, or hired help. But they lost this support when they emigrated. Some women from mainland China find that the lack of subsidized daycare

makes it impossible for them to cope with the competing demands of paid work and childcare and prevents them from obtaining full-time work. Here, a mainland woman reflected on how her extended family members cooperated in the social reproduction of raising children:

My mother used to take care of my daughter [when we were in China]. She also cooks for us and does the housework. Now, in Canada, we have to do everything ourselves....I don't have any help. My parents are not here. [MLFG: N2]

Similarly, women from Hong Kong, who were used to having a good support system at home, found it particularly difficult when they had to cope with housework and childcare alone. A marketing manager in a firm when she was in Hong Kong, this woman was not able to work full-time in Canada due to childcare responsibilities:

No, I couldn't [work full-time] because I had to look after my child since I didn't have relatives to help me. I only got a brother here and both our parents were in Hong Kong. During that time, when my child was in school, I worked part time. I once worked as a salesperson in a fashion boutique and later as a counter helper in a food store. [HKFG: N2]

In Hong Kong, this woman, like other middle-class women in Hong Kong, was able to obtain the help of a full-time domestic to take care of her children. She related to me the differences between Hong Kong and Canada in terms of doing housework and caring for children:

There's a great difference. In Hong Kong, many of us employ domestic help. But here in Canada, we have to do housework ourselves. If husbands share housework with their wives, that's better. [HKFG: N2]

Some husbands do help out. They take on such tasks as cutting the grass, shoveling the snow, and vacuuming, etc. However, the wives are still responsible for the bulk of the work. One woman was able to secure the help of her mother to care for her children, and her husband also shared the household work. She advocated the importance of having a spouse who shares the housework:

Though I work full time, I don't have a household help here. I have to do it myself. But I'm quite lucky because I have my mom taking care of my

kids and cooking for us and I'll do the rest. My husband is working full time as well. But he also does some housework like ironing clothes, vacuuming and so on. I think housework must be shared between the couple. Otherwise it would be too much of a burden for one person. [HKFG: N4]

For those women who have extended family members in Canada, they were able to seek help from them:

I don't have to do any housework in Hong Kong because my mom did all the housework. Here in Canada, since I don't have to work full time, I do some housework. Luckily, I live with my mother-in-law who does the cooking and some other housework. And she also helps in taking care of my child. [HKFG: N3]

For the Hong Kong women who have young children, and whose household economic position allowed them to forgo a second wage, many have resolved to stay home to care for their children rather than partaking in menial work. For those women from mainland China who found the lack of subsidized daycare for their children made it impossible for them to cope with the competing demands of paid work and childcare, they opted for part-time work instead.

## Gender Relations

Wife's unemployment affects gender relations and household division of labor. Obviously, there are variations among husbands in terms of their participation in household work. For example, it was found that husbands from urban centers contribute more in household work than their rural counterparts (Lu et al. 2000). In the following, I will relate how one mainland Chinese woman reflected on the transformation of her relationship with her husband in terms of household division of labor. This woman has worked as a software engineer in China for three years. Since immigrating to Canada, she became unemployed, and was financially dependent on her husband. Her husband was able to re-enter the labor market in Canada. Her unemployment and hence lack of financial independence make it difficult for her to negotiate an equal division of labor in the household. Here is how she related her frustration:

There is a huge difference to me and it greatly changed my life. In China we [husband and I] both worked and both had a not too bad income. We shared our housework. Now although I feel reluctant to be a housewife, I have to do all the housework. He doesn't have the time to help me, neither does he want to. He thinks it's natural that I take over all the housework. I feel very depressed. That's why I'm desperate for a job, not only because I need the money, but because I need to get back my respect and confidence. [MLFG: N5]

Other women from Hong Kong and mainland China, however, found their relationships with their spouses have improved. The sentiment is exemplified by this Hong Kong woman's narrative:

My relationship with my husband has improved after we immigrated to Canada. When we were in Hong Kong, we always had gatherings with our friends when we had some leisure time. We took care of our child only when our domestic helper was on holiday. But in Canada, we lead a more healthy life. For example, we reserve the weekends as our family day. Instead of enjoying unhealthy activities [like] when he was Hong Kong, my husband starts to play badminton [now]. [HKFG: N4]

## Transnational Strategies

### Transnational Mothering

Some immigrant women from mainland China, who have had to negotiate several part-time jobs in order to make ends meet, and who have difficulty obtaining subsidized childcare, have resolved to send their children back to China to be taken care of by their grandmothers or other family members. The following is what a mainland woman in her early thirties, who was a medical doctor in China, and whose husband was an engineer, told me why she made her decision:

When we first came, I was pregnant with my daughter. My husband and I were both looking for work in our areas of work, but with no luck. We were unemployed. Then my husband's friend took us to the factory where he worked, and we both got jobs in the factory. After my daughter was born, I couldn't work because I couldn't get subsidized childcare. So we decided to send my daughter back to China to be taken care of by her grandma. My husband and I worked in that factory for two years, as menial laborers. Now I work as a part-time

research assistant, and my husband is still working in the factory. He's applied to move to the U.S. though, and we'll leave as soon as we get the papers.... [MLFG: N6]

Other mainland women also related their dilemma of coping with the contradictory demands of childcare and paid work, and decided to send their children back to China to be taken care of by grandmothers:

My son was sent back to China already. I feel it's very stressful doing the job search and taking care of my child at the same time, both mentally and physically. Sometimes this affected my attitude towards my son, and he would feel confused when I easily lose my patience. After sending my son back to China, I have more time studying and working, so I think it's a right decision to make. [MLFG: N3]

For one Hong Kong immigrant, however, transnational mothering was foisted on her unexpectedly. After she and her husband immigrated to Canada, her son found better job opportunities in Hong Kong, and returned there to work:

... my son had gone[from Hong Kong] to the U.K. to do his university studies. In 2001 [when the family immigrated to Toronto], my son has almost finished his university education [in the U.K.]. But if he continued his study in Canada, he would have to take more courses [due to the difference in programs] and that's what he didn't want to do. So [after he landed] he went back to the U.K. to finish his university education. I think he has somehow given up the idea of immigrating [to Canada]. So he only stayed in Canada for 4–5 months. But he couldn't find a job here whereas his classmates had already found theirs in Hong Kong, so he went back to Hong Kong. To our surprise, before he left for Hong Kong, he went online to seek for jobs and within a week after he arrived in Hong Kong, he got a job at a university there. [HKFG: N2]

### Astronauts and Parachute Children

While transnational mothering is prevalent among the mainland Chinese immigrants, among the Hong Kong Chinese, transnational familial arrangements popularly known as “astronaut” families are common. Astronaut families are families in which one spouse (typically the husband) returns to Hong Kong for paid employment, leaving the other spouse (typically the wife) and children in Canada. The astronaut flies back to Canada

periodically to visit the family, and sometimes, the family would return to Hong Kong for a visit (Man 1995). However, astronaut wives often speak of isolation and loneliness.

Some women from Hong Kong who were discouraged by their underemployment and unemployment in Canada have resolved to return to Hong Kong to find work, along with their husbands, leaving their children alone in Canada.<sup>4</sup> These children are coined “parachute” or “satellite” children as they are being dropped off in a distant country. While outside of the scope of my research, the long-term effects of “parachute children” warrant investigation.

One Hong Kong couple planned their transnational familial arrangement as astronauts before immigration as a response to the uncertainty of finding a secure and permanent position in Canada. They traveled back and forth between Canada and Hong Kong to accommodate their work and household circumstances, leaving their parachute children in Toronto to be taken care of by their grandmother. However, the separation has taken its toll, and the couple eventually decided to curtail their transnational arrangements. Here is what the wife told me:

... So, after we had landed, we left behind our two kids [with my mother in Toronto]... We flew back to Hong Kong to continue our career. In those days, every six months, we would fly back to Canada to stay for a while and then went back to Hong Kong to work. We had led this kind of life for some time... After a long struggle, we decided to have my husband stay behind in Hong Kong to continue his work and I came to Canada by myself... My husband eventually came back to Canada for good. [HKFG: N4]

### Transnational Caring of Aging Parents

Another Hong Kong couple was torn by having to care for two sets of aging parents in different geographical spaces. Their struggle is not unlike

<sup>4</sup>A study funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Strategic Grant on “Transnational Citizenship and Social Cohesion: Recent Immigrants from Hong Kong to Canada” by Audrey Kobayashi (PI), David Ley, Guida Man, Valerie Preston, and Myer Siemiatycki found that such occurrences are not uncommon among recent immigrants from Hong Kong.



those belonging to the “sandwich generation” in Canada, i.e., middle-aged couples who are responsible for looking after their own children while simultaneously caring for aging parents who reside in a different city or province. This is what the wife told me:

... Besides, my mother-in-law and father-in-law are very old. We live with them [in Canada]. We don't feel comfortable leaving them behind if we go back to Hong Kong... Well, if I do decide to go back to Hong Kong, it would be because I want to take care of my parents. You know, as a Christian, I always regret that I can't physically be with them all these years after I have immigrated to Canada. (HKFG: N3)

## Conclusion

For many Hong Kong and mainland Chinese women in my study, the deterioration of the material conditions of their families in the new country necessitated the adoption of transnational practices as a solution to continue their productive and reproductive processes, i.e., maintaining employment and the raising of children in separate geographical spaces through transnational familial networks and linkages.

While some scholars argue that transnationalism may have a tendency in reinscribing traditional cultural norms and values, these transnational mothering practices transcend cultural traditions and constitute a variation in the social organization and arrangement of mothering referred to by Pierrett Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) as “transnational motherhood.” This term, however, denotes that only women are responsible for mothering. I adopt the term “transnational mothering” rather than “transnational parenting,” not to essentialize women’s “natural” ability for child-care and mothering, but rather, to emphasize the structural inequalities as well as socialization processes in society which relegate women to the role of primary caregivers and nurturers.

My study has illustrated the transnational processes in Chinese communities both historically as well as in contemporary society. I demonstrate that transnational familial practices of Chinese

immigrants in Canada in recent years are a gendered process, complicated by the contradictory demands of immigrant women’s paid work and household responsibilities in the context of globalization and economic restructuring, as well as institutionalized and organizational processes, cultural practices, and immigrant women’s own agency.

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# Female University Students Dreaming of Becoming Housewives

10

Joyce Chan Wai-man

How deeply does the tradition of “men outside, women inside” still influence modern people? In the past, people took for granted that women would become full-time housewives for their husbands and would take care of children after getting married. Now, with the many changes that have taken place in society, women’s opportunity to receive education has grown a great deal, enhancing their competitive power in the market. Many women continue their career after marriage so that dual-income families are becoming more and more common.

Although most people are accustomed to the dual-income family, some women are not career-minded. Although they are university graduates and expect to have a productive career, for some of them, their only desire is to become ordinary housewives. What factors have actually led them to think in these terms?

This study has interviewed a group of current female undergraduates in depth. The interviewees give free rein to their lively imaginations and voice their aspirations for the ideal married life. They express their views on the importance of the family, the role of a housewife, work, etc. I thereby hope to comprehend the state of mind and aspirations of desire undergraduates with regard to marriage and family, and their views on modern society.

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## The Literature

### The Influence of Gender Role on Women

Parsons and Bales (1955) think that in the family, division of labour is carried out in accordance with gender. The father plays an instrumental role in the family, working outside the home, taking charge of family decision making and problem solving. The duty of raising the children falls on the shoulders of the mother. The mother plays an expressive role, being responsible for housework, for resolving conflicts among family members and increasing family cohesion. To a certain extent, this kind of gender-based division of labour and stereotyping influences women’s choices after marriage.

### Gender Ideology

Hochschild (1989) talks of a gender ideology and points out that women’s gender ideology will influence the role that they want to play after marriage. Marital roles can be divided into the following three categories—traditional, egalitarian and transitional. Women who identify with the traditional gender ideology tend to attach importance to family activities, aspiring to be a good wife and mother and hoping that their husband will focus on his career. Women who are egalitarian-minded want to be equal with their husband in every respect. Women with transitional gender ideology

think that it is their important duty to look after their family, but they still want to go out to work and help earn the family's keep, after dealing with the housework.

Hattery (2001) points out that motherhood ideology will influence a mother's decision on whether to go out to work or stay at home for the family. This includes an intensive ideology which stresses motherhood. Women of this kind think that they are more suited to taking care of children on the grounds that the mother is very important for the establishment of children's growth and cognitive ability. So they are willing to stay at home and look after the children. There are other types of motherhood ideology. One advocates that the mother should go out to work, whether to supplement the family income or for her own satisfaction. Another advocates that the mother and the maid together form a group to look after the children. Yet another advocates that the mother play the instrumental role and the expressive role at the same time.

### **Status and Power of the Housewife in the Family**

In the family, there are mainly two kinds of power—marital power and familial power. Lips (1994) points out that it is easier for the housewife to lose marital power. Because the housewife relies on the income of the husband, the husband is central in familial decision making and is more powerful than the housewife. As for familial power, because the housewife has more time to stay at home and take care of the children, her relations with the children will be better. As a result, the children will prefer to communicate with the mother and be more loyal to the mother. It is thus easier for the housewife to play a central role in the family, facilitating and maintaining bonds between family members. So housewives enjoy more familial power.

Laing (1971) describes family with the metaphor of the flower: the mother is the pistil and the children are petals. When the children depart, the mother will hurt as if she had lost her arms, whereas the father never enters the picture.

This is rather similar to Lips' (1994) point of view—in the family, the mother plays a central role, and the connection between the children and the mother will be closer, while the father is an outsider. So it is easier for females to gain familial power.

### **Housework and Women**

Glazer-Malbin (1976) thinks that traditionally housework is women's work. In a capitalistic society, only things which involve money are valuable, and so housework is deemed to be without value. Housework is just a private activity, which only has value within the family. It will not flow into the commercial market, nor will it generate surplus value. So the value of housework is often disregarded, and it is a thankless and unwelcome job.

Housewives are busy with housework every day, the boredom and monotony of which will make them isolated and reduce their opportunities to socialize with friends and relatives. Consequently they will lose contact with people. Moreover, since housework cannot enhance family income, housewives are regarded as worthless and dependent on their husbands.

Ross and Mirowsky (1994) point out that many women have to work "outside" (the home) as well as do housework and take care of children. Facing a double burden, they are under heavy pressure and may experience role strain because working outside reduces their time at home and may affect their roles as a wife and mother. Only if the husband is willing to share the housework will the pressure on working women be reduced.

### **Factors Influencing Whether Women Choose to Work or Not When Married**

Hattery (2001) points out that there are several factors influencing whether women will choose to work or not when married. First of all, there is the influence of family background. Parents semi-consciously pass on their own views to children.



Some parents teach their daughters that women should spend more time with their family; they urge them to stay at home when they have children, telling them that men would not want to marry a woman who does not want to stay at home. In this way, the daughter is more likely to become a housewife.

On the other hand, if the message from the parents is that they should pursue knowledge and career and be independent, then they are more likely to spend more time on their career in the future.

Another factor is rational choice. Because women want to bring the greatest benefit to the family—in both economic and childcare terms—they assess the value of human capital in the market, such as educational level, working skills and working experience, in order to decide whether to go out to work or to be a housewife.

Hattery also explains why certain women choose to be housewives. Some women have a more traditional mindset, deeming that men belong to the public domain and are responsible for earning a living for the family, while women belong to the private domain and are responsible for taking care of children at home on a full-time basis. This kind of arrangement is best, because it can increase the time that husband and wife spend together.

Moreover, they think that the job of a mother who goes out to work already exhausts herself; if she still has to be with her children for long hours after work, she will only get even more tired and stressed. Full-time housewives, however, do not have to face this kind of pressure. Moreover, housewives can do the job of looking after the family better. They are convinced that taking care of the children is the most important duty of the mother and cannot be done by proxy. They do not fully consider such factors as family income, their value in the market, whether there are other ways to take care of the children, and whether the husband can help look after the children. They only consider that a good mother has to stay at home, assist the husband and bring up the kids.

Some women think that the best arrangement is to work part-time after getting married, because they think that it is very difficult to meet the

demands of both work and family, and that working full time will make it difficult for them to spend time with the family. In contrast, working part time enables them to spend more time with the family.

Some women plan to return to the labour market when their children reach a certain age. This is not only for family livelihood but also for the non-economic benefits brought about by work. They think that working can increase opportunities to socialize and make friends. In addition, working makes them feel that their existence has value. These non-economic benefits are difficult to obtain in the family.

### **Arrangements for and Duty of Bringing Up Children**

In Hong Kong, society imposes on women a relatively traditional role, which is to raise children (Lee 2002). Interviewing housewives on their views about childcare, Hattery (2001) discovers that, for the mother to build up a good relationship with the children, mother and child require regular contacts of many hours' duration over a considerable period of time. Consigning the children to the care of other people will hinder the establishment of a close bond between mother and child. In respect of upbringing, housewives think that the mother has the responsibility to be the first teacher of the children. Children form their own values and personality before the age of three, so it is necessary to instil correct ethics and values in the children at a young age. Housewives think that a mother has to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of her children so that they will grow healthily. Housewives therefore choose to stay at home and look after their children personally.

However, Rossi (1983) points out that caring for the children is indeed an "ordeal" for the mother because she has to face physical, psychological and economic pressures. Physically, it is very tiring to take care of children. Psychologically, the mother worries about her children falling sick or not growing up to be useful persons, and these worries are a source of pressure. Economically, it

is very expensive to bring up children. So the mother faces different kinds of stress in taking care of her children.

This being so, the mother has to do some psychological work, which is the set of family-operation mechanisms as propounded by Laing (1971). The most basic one is to deny things which they do not want to accept. Even if it is very stressful to take care of children, they will still deny it, and think that they are happy to do so, resorting to displacement activities to make themselves feel better. Moreover, they will forget unpleasant matters by means of repression. These mechanisms enable women to forget unpleasant matters related to their childcare and to think that they live in a happy family. In reality, they may only be playing a happy-housewife game, trying to convince themselves that it is a happy thing to be a housewife.

### The Inner World of Housewives

“*Ma ma hui jia bu shang ban* [Mother Goes Home and Does not Work” (1988) of *Tuesday File* and “Housewives’ Blues” (2002) of *The Pearl Report*, two television programmes produced by Television Broadcast Limited, Hong Kong, interviewed some women who have given up working in order to be full-time housewives. The former programme is conducive to our understanding of the inner world of housewives.

Some women hope to have more time to look after their children, and that is why they are willing to give up work in order to be housewives. When they have to work outside as well, they have little time for their children. In the morning, they have to hurry to work after eating breakfast with their kids. When they are tired after work, it is hard for them to look after their children, even though they are willing, and they often take it out on their children. Because it is difficult to deal with work and family at the same time, they give up their career in order to become full-time housewives. Having become housewives and no longer under the pressures of work, they are able to devote more time to the family. They can look after their children’s daily lives, take them to school and pick them up afterwards. In addition,

they have time to go through their homework with them. More importantly, in the process, they can spend time with their children and communicate with them. The bond with their children becomes stronger and closer than before. In fact, the growth stage of children is very short. It is satisfying for the mother to stay at home and witness her children growing up. Although working brings in money, money is incomparable to what can be gained by giving up work and staying at home as a housewife.

The women interviewed in “Housewives’ Blues” tell of the downside of being a housewife. Housewives have a considerable workload. They have to work more than 12 hours a day and they have no holidays.

After becoming housewives, they feel more cut off from their husbands and friends. In addition, other people not only fail to appreciate their giving up work for the sake of the family, but also criticize the way they do their housework. In fact, they have already sacrificed a great deal for their family. One of the women used to hope she would win the Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award and be able to continue her studies. But she has to do housework as well as monitor her children’s studies, as a result of which she simply cannot find time for her own studies. For the sake of her children, she has no choice but to give up her goal. It can thus be seen that quite a few housewives have to sacrifice their own pursuits and leave talents unfulfilled in order to look after their children and family.

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### Methodology

This study employed in-depth interview in order to find out why female undergraduates wish to become housewives. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured method. That is, the categories of the questions were listed before the interview; during the interview, the order of the questions may be adjusted according to the interviewee’s answers. When it was felt that certain responses deserved further exploration, more data were acquired by way of follow-up questions.

After the first in-depth interview, the data were first subjected to preliminary analysis. If further

information is required, the subject will be interviewed again.

This study interviewed 12 female undergraduates, all of whom hope to become housewives when married. When the female undergraduates, who have not much experience of the world, imagine their ideal family, they are less subject to the influence of reality. In this study, housewife is defined as a woman who will devote more than half of her time to her family when married.

Name of interviewee	Age	Department	Year of studies
Ah Chi	21	Sociology	3
Ah Ting	23	Sociology	3
San San	20	Anthropology	2
Ah Ying	21	Translation	2
Ka Na	21	Geography	2
Siu Pan	22	Sociology	3
Man Man	21	Industrial Engineering and Management	2
Ah Nei	21	Sociology	3
Man Wah	21	Chinese	2
Ah Tzi	21	Chinese	3
Siu Ping	21	History	3
Ah Yan	23	Sociology	3

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

### The Future Family: As Visualized and as Hoped for

Most interviewees hope to become housewives after getting married and starting a family. Some hope to be full-time housewives, some hope to work part time or develop their personal interests when their children reach school age. Only Ah Ying and Ah Yan hope to work full time when their children grow up.

### Acceptance of "Men Outside, Women Inside"

The interviewees tend to accept the model of "men outside, women outside", which operates well in the families of seven of the interviewees. So they hope to follow this mode of division of

labour when married. This shows that they are under the influence of their present family.

They think that "men outside, women inside" has the following merits:

The duties are clearer. Men, being responsible for going out to earn money, can put aside domestic affairs and concentrate on their work, whereas women, not having to work outside and make money for the family, can focus on domestic affairs. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

In keeping with their acceptance of traditional gender roles, they hope to become housewives after marriage. They see it as inevitable that men will take care of external affairs, that men should place a premium on their career.

Man Man and San San point out that the best division of labour is that one takes care of the external and the other takes care of the internal. But who is responsible for which task need not be determined according to gender. It should depend on which party is best suited to what. Although they do not mind who is in charge of the internal and who is in charge of the external, they admit that "men outside, women inside" is generally approved of and accepted in society.

From that it can be seen that the labour-division concept mentioned by Parsons and Bales (1955) is still significantly influential. Most of the interviewees think that "men outside, women inside" is best. Even though Man Man and San San are not particularly gender-minded regarding division of housework, they think that "men outside, women inside" is more easily acceptable.

### Reasons for Aspiring to Be a Housewife

The interviewees long to become housewives after marriage, and they think this is the bounden duty of women:

After marriage, women should return to the family. Although modern women can go out to work, I think women's ultimate goal should be staying at home to look after children. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

It can thus be seen that the interviewees take it for granted that they will become housewives after marriage. As posited by Hegel, this world is a unity of the given and the constructed.

The interviewees regard being a housewife as women's bounden duty, which is in fact a role endorsed by society. They would even regard this social law as a natural law, because the social law is so deeply rooted in people's minds that it is taken to be a natural law (Laing 1971), and women are willing to follow it of their own accord.

What factors have led them to this way of thinking? Often it is the mother's influence. When asked what she thought was the advantage of being a housewife, Ah Ting answered:

The advantage must be that the relationship with the children will be closer. When you have more time with your children, the relationship will definitely be better. The same applies to me. When I was a child, I hardly dared talk to my father, whereas I confided in my mother about everything. I hope my children in the future will not hide things in their minds that they will be willing to tell me even very minor things. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

It can thus be seen that their decision to become housewives is influenced by their mothers. Moreover, some interviewees want to be housewives as a reaction to their mothers' going out to work. Ka Na states:

I will attach importance to family after marriage. I will give birth to children soon after marriage and then take care of them. If I am a professional woman, my family may be imperfect. In my childhood, my mother had to go to work and had only one day off every week. Once I went to play at my aunt's home and didn't want to go home because I felt my mother did not care about me. And my mother told me off at the bus stop, "Well, stay here then, if you don't want to go home". I had had such a good time at my aunt's home that I really did not want to leave. Even when the bus came, I kept crying and refused to get on board. So I think it is not a good idea for a mother to go out to work. (Ka Na, 21 years old)

Having missed her mother's company during childhood, she does not want to go out to work like her mother in the future. Ah Ying has a similar feeling:

I did not grow up under the care of my mother. Being looked after by one's immediate family feels different from being looked after by a relative. I remember that when my mother began to take care of me personally, I missed my grandmother who had brought me up, and I still feel closer to her. (Ah Ying, 21 years)

Although Ah Ying's grandmother only took care of her for seven years, it was at the stage when a child most needs love and care. So she always feels closer to her grandmother than to her mother. This feeling remains with her even after more than 10 years. As a result, in order to build up a close connection with her own children, she hopes to become a full-time housewife and focus on childcare. It can thus be seen that her decision is to some extent a consequence of the negative influence of her mother.

From this we can see that when the interviewee's mother is a housewife, she will sense the merits of the mother not having to work outside; when the interviewee's mother has to go out to work, she will feel personally the negative impact of being a working mother. They will weigh the options of career and family from their personal experience.

Some interviewees state that sometimes they discuss with friends who want to be housewives the merits of this option. The interviewees and their friends think that the life of a housewife is more enjoyable. Apart from doing housework, they can do things they like, such as staying at home to look after the children, preparing dinner for the husband, and decorating the home. They and their friends think that it is a great blessing for women to be provided for by their husband after marriage, and that it is something worth showing off about. So they feel very excited when talking with their friends about that; their friends' approval and encouragement reinforce their desire to develop in this direction. It can thus be seen that individual belief and group belief influence each other. When an individual wants to be a housewife, it is just an individual belief. But when the merits of being a housewife are shared and approved of in conversations among friends with similar thoughts and values, they will influence each other. A group belief will reinforce an individual belief, making one wish to become a housewife even more. Friends exert a definite influence on the interviewees:

My friends who want to be housewives and I enjoy mutual sympathy, approval and respect. We are on the same wavelength. When I was talking with a friend, she told me what she wants from life.

She said that her material requirements are small that she will be content with adequate food and accommodation. She does not need a luxurious house or goods of famous brands. She will be satisfied with a family, a kid and being able to see the child grow up. If you are satisfied with a kid or being a housewife, then why should you mind what other people think? Because these are what you want and what satisfies you. Her words make me think about what I want from life, and what may satisfy me—Is it a luxurious life or the nurturing of certain relationships? She has made me think about that, and I think it influences me. (Ah Yan, 23 years old)

## Praise of Housewives

The interviewees think that housewives can invest the largest amount of time in their family. This is most attractive to them. The time required by a full-time job reduces the time available to look after children and do housework. Therefore, they hope that they do not have to work full time after marriage:

Practically speaking, when you have a full-time job which absorbs much of your mental and physical energy, how will you find time to look after your children? Even now I am very tired every day. When I return home, I already do not want to do anything or deal with anything. If I come home in this frame of mind, and there are children waiting for me to look after and housework waiting for me to do, I will not be able to handle them well. Since children are so important, I cannot afford to make a bad job of looking after them. So it is very difficult to work and care about family at the same time. (Ah Yan, 23 years old)

The interviewees feel the twofold, double-shift burden of the working mother described by Hochschild (1989). It is already very tiring to work during the day time, and then it is necessary to do housework and take care of the children. As they do not want to face the double burden and they are worried that they cannot take care of their children and do the housework well, they prefer to be housewives and give up working full time.

Housewives can invest more time in their family, and so the interviewees think that this is good for husband, children and themselves.

Housewives' relationships with their husbands may be better, because they manage the housework properly so that their husbands do not have to worry about it and can give all their attention to their work. This helps to reduce the pressure on the husband. Man Man cannot agree more with this point:

When my husband is working hard, I will be cooking and preparing soup, and he won't have to do the housework. He will only have to deal with the pressures of his work. When he returns home, he won't have to take care of trivial domestic matters. This will lessen his burden by half. (Man Man, 21 years old)

Moreover, Siu Pan thinks that being a housewife will enable her to have more time to prepare different kinds of food, such as heart-shaped cake, in order to provide the couple with more treats. San San and Man Wah think that when both husband and wife have to set off for work early in the morning and do not come home until evening, their contact time will be limited. When they are tired after work, they will not feel like talking much. Housewives are different; they are more willing to make an effort to communicate with their husbands. San San thinks that housewives are more minded to make a fuss of their husbands—for example, they are more likely to give them an affectionate welcome when they come home from work. Man Wah thinks that she will have more time and energy to care about her husband and listen to him: "How was work today? Have you had a hard time?" As the time spent by housewives at home is longer, they are more willing to communicate with their husband. They will make an effort to understand their husband's work conditions in order to promote the relationship.

In respect of the relationship with their children, the interviewees think that housewives have more time and energy to devote to their children's upbringing. They can pay more attention to their behaviour and keep them on the straight and narrow. When their children fall ill, they can give them immediate attention. In respect of communication, as housewives have more time to spend with their children and as children are more inclined to communicate with



their mother, the mother–child relationship will be closer. Man Wah points out that, if she goes out to work, she can only see her children in the morning and in the evening, and they simply do not have enough time with each other. Ka Na takes as an example the little girl who comes to her for private tuition:

As her mother has to go to work, she is always complaining that her mother is “not very nice”, “horrible”, and that her mother often won’t let her go out. You (working mothers) cannot see your child often. When you go out to work, you do not know what your children think, and when you refuse to let them go out, they feel very unhappy. (Ka Na, 21 years old)

Therefore, in order to build up a good relationship with the children and understand their needs, it is of paramount importance to be a housewife:

Children think that mother is smarter, because they witness mother slaving away at home, but they do not understand the pressures on father working outside. On the contrary, they think, “Oh, Mother is so tired; she has to do all the housework”. You will not feel your father’s pressures until you grow up and see things more clearly. Because you do not see your father very often in your childhood and do not see in what respects he is “smart”, you will not know the pressures your father is under until you grow up. It was the same with me, too. In my childhood, my mother taught me to do housework and cook, and I felt she was very “smart”. I did not know that father also worked very hard until I grew up. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

Children are more sympathetic to their mother’s hardships, whereas they do not show much understanding and sympathy for their father. As Lips says (1994), children are more loyal to their mother. So it is easier for housewives to acquire familial power. All the interviewees realize this.

As housewives have more time to themselves, they are freer to do what they want after finishing the chores—for example, they may listen to music, surf the net, go shopping and play mah-jong with friends, as they like. Moreover, Ah Tzi thinks that the greatest advantage of being a housewife is that everything is under her control. No job will allow you to be in charge of everything, but a housewife can be in control of her own life. Because what a housewife faces every day is trivial but predictable.

The interviewees stress that housewives can have more time to care about their husband and children. This is very different from the focus of normal working mothers. Because working mothers cannot find enough time to spend with their family, they stress quality more—caring for and looking after family do not depend on how much time is spent; quality is more important than quantity. But what the interviewees emphasize is quantity, thinking that the more time is devoted to the family, the better the relationship with them is.

Some interviewees even praise housewives, thinking that it is a blessing to be provided for, something worth showing off about. They even think that their friends should admire them, because having to go to work is to suffer; being a housewife is to enjoy—being able to have fun with the kids without having to work. Not only their friends will admire them for that, but the children’s friends will admire them for having a housewife-mother. For example, children like their mother picking them up after school:

My mother used to work when I was little. If she was late picking me and my brother up after school, we would cry at school. I needed to see mother waiting for me outside after school, otherwise I would cry. My brother even wanted my mother to be at the head of the queue of parents picking up their children. If my mother was not at the head of the queue, he would cry. As a result, my mother gave up working. She remained a housewife when I was in primary as well as secondary school. When I was in primary school, she took me down the stairs and watched me going to school. I liked that kind of feeling. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

The feeling of being picked up by mother after school is so good that the children blessed with this privilege will be envied by their friends:

Children like to be picked by their mother after school. I saw schoolmates being picked up by people other than their mother after school. I felt they would envy me for being taken to school and picked up after school by my mother. I wish to do this for my children, too, in the future. I think this kind of feeling is very comforting. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

It used to be common for children to be picked up by their mother after school, whereas it was

exceptional to be picked up by a maid. But now, because of the emergence of dual-income families, most children are picked up by maids. In contrast, being picked up by one's mother after school seems to be a blessing. So Ah Ting thinks that it will be a very comforting thing to be able to take her children to school and pick them up afterwards. It can thus be seen how the interviewees praise the role played by the housewife in the family.

### Children Are Indispensable

All the interviewees wish to have children in the future, not simply with a view to continuing the family line or ensuring that they are cared for in their old age, but because of the emotional fulfilment that comes from bearing children. Many interviewees take for granted that childbearing is women's duty and have never considered not giving birth after marriage:

This is women's duty. Without childbearing, women's life seems to lack something. Giving birth to children is like fulfilling a human duty. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

Childbearing is the duty of women. Since women are blessed with this gift, why not give birth? (Man Man, 21 years old)

I simply think that after marriage one has to give birth to children. This instinct is very strong. (Ka Na, 21 years old)

They do not question childbearing at all, thinking that after marriage it is one's duty to procreate. They would see procreation as a necessary stage of life. Having dated for a long time, it is time to get married; having been married for a while, it is time to have children:

It is nice for a couple to lead a private life, but when they reach a certain stage, they should have a child. In fact, I think it is essential to have a child. (San San, 20 years old)

The psychological satisfaction derived from one's children is more important than economic reward. A perfect and wholesome family has to have not only husband and wife but also father, mother and children. It will inevitably be boring

to face just the husband for decades at home. Staying at home all the time, a housewife will not know what to do after doing the housework if she does not have children to divert her from boredom and relax her mind:

Life will become very boring if you do not have children, unless you have other pleasurable distractions, travel with your spouse when you have time or do a lot of things for your spouse. The marital relationship may be very passionate initially, but after some time, it will be more and more boring for a couple to live like that. With kids, you can watch them grow up. This kind of family will be more wholesome and less boring. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

Procreation can maintain the marital relationship apart from bringing the couple more delights.

Another reason why the interviewees seriously consider having children is the irreplaceable tie of blood. Many interviewees regard children as the continuation of their own life, closely connected to themselves:

Cats and dogs are just pets, whereas you give birth to children after you have conceived and carried them for 10 months. Once you have become a mother, you will recognize the greatness of motherhood. Every female wants to experience motherhood, to have children of her own. Some people may adopt children, but they are not one's own natural offspring after all. No matter what, I want to have offspring of my own. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

Man Wah, by comparing adopted children to pets, reveals how important it is for her to have children related to her by blood. This is an irreplaceable feeling, which prompts the interviewees to desire childbearing.

Most interviewees set great store by their personal psychological satisfaction, whereas Ah Yan, looking at the world from the point of view of her unborn children, hopes that they will enjoy life:

I think children will love this world. I did say that I would never have children. At that time I hated this world; thinking that people here didn't care about the environment, were not nice to each other, and were heading towards annihilation. So I did not want to bring another human being into a world of suffering. But since growing up, I have found life to be very beautiful, offering the experience of wonderful people and events. In my

experience, what has touched me most is human beings. So bringing children into the world can be justified by the knowledge that they, too, will experience the wonders of this world. (Ah Yan, 23 years old)

The purpose of reproduction is either for oneself or for the children, but most interviewees do not expect reciprocity from their children. What concerns them is being able to give the best to their children. They will be satisfied if they see their own children grow up healthy, with their own career and family:

I do not necessarily care whether they (children) repay me or not. It is already something to give your child values, to raise a person who will not harm others. Children are a blank sheet of paper. They don't have any ideas of their own, it all comes from you. It really requires a lot of hard work to make them into good people. Making them into people who will make a positive contribution to society is already a great achievement. So I do not expect them to feel they owe me favours; I am already very grateful if they do not go astray. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

This once again proves that they do not seem to be very concerned about economic reciprocity from their children. It is already a great reward to them if their children grow up to become healthy and valuable members of society. This is not only what they expect to achieve; it is also an enormous source of pleasure for them:

It is of course difficult to bring them up. But when they are grown up and have achievements behind them, you will feel very contented. My mother brought me up until I went up to university. I think she must be proud of me. So it is really a pleasant and interesting thing to watch a child grow up and develop in its own way. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

Moreover, it is very interesting to witness a child grow up to adulthood, to be there when it utters its first "mummy" and "daddy". Ah Nei, who witnessed her younger brother grow up, feels exactly this way:

What was most wonderful was to watch him grow up from an infant bathed by me. Then he gradually became taller and taller, walked and jumped continually for reasons unknown to me. Then he learnt to speak and gradually grew up. In retrospect, I find it a miracle that he is now even

taller than me. When I used to hold him in my arms, he was still very small. Now he is already so tall and big. It is really miraculous. (Ah Nei, 21 years)

According to Parsons and Bales (1955), the personality, instead of existing from childbirth, is formed in the process of socialization. A child's personality is entirely constructed by the family as if in a "factory". Ah Nei finds it wonderful to have experienced the special feeling of hugging her younger brother, and of watching him develop.

At that time, I was very young. My two elder sisters were already studying at secondary school. Mother only allowed my elder sisters but not me to hug my younger brother. "Why can't I hug him?" I complained. "You'll have to sit up straight then". And then I was allowed to hug him. At that moment, I was very elated and moved, as my mother had given birth to him. You will really feel very moved to watch your own offspring grow up. To be just a sister is already so exciting, not to mention a mother who gives birth to a child. (Ah Nei, 21 years old)

Moreover, some interviewees enjoy the act of playing with children. This is yet another of the pleasures of being a parent:

When children are off school, we can arrange some activities for them, for example, going to Jumping Gym. In this way, both you and they will be happy. (Siu Pun, 22 years old)

By playing with children, parents once again have the opportunity to return to childhood and regain long-lasting innocence. As Parsons and Bales say (1955), family is a place of joy which stabilizes the adult personality. As soon as people return home, they can forget the troubles and stresses encountered outside. Family is a place that provides emotional support for us, a kind of "psychological gold." So the interviewees enjoy playing with children.

To sum up, the reason why the interviewees want to have children is because children are a source of pleasure. When they talk about children, they look happy. Sometimes they keep saying how lovely children are, as if they had really given birth to a child.

## Being a Good Mother

All the interviewees insist they will personally take care of their children, on the grounds that parents play a very important role in the development of children, especially up to the age of three.

Parents' teaching by their own example and speech is most important and has a profound influence on children. Turning children over to the Filipina maid will not make them well bred. The first three years of childhood are crucial for children (San San, 20 years old).

The importance of personally educating one's children lies in the possibility of instilling correct values into them. Ah Yan, who used to be engaged in child education, points out that it is best for the child if it is the parents who instil values:

Being looked after by the Filipina maid and the grandmother is different from being looked after by the mother. It will be different in terms of both personality and attitude. Many things are inculcated from childhood. If you instil values into the child when it is small, it will benefit from them all its life. In my childhood, my mother took care of me full time. So I think I will personally take care of my own kids. This will be better than consigning them to the care of the maid. (Ah Yan, 23 years old)

This is rather similar to Parsons and Bales's (1955) view. They think that one of the functions of the family is to be a tool of socialization. Socialization in the first year after birth is very important. The mother's role in this process is crucial. From the perspective of psychology, Freud thinks that when a child is born, it is perfect and faultless, and everything is added by the parents. Its personality will be shaped by the time it is three years old. After the age of three, no matter what happens, its personality will not alter much; at the most, it can only be modified slightly.

All the housewives interviewed by Hattery (2001) think that the world view and personality of the child are established before the age of three, so they hope to instil certain ethical values during these first three years. Now these undergraduates hope to explain the importance of personally instilling values into children from sociological and psychological perspectives.

Another reason why the interviewees hope personally to take care of their children arises from the mothers' concern for their children. Many interviewees hope to become full-time housewives after marriage because they are concerned about their children's conduct, health and studies. They want to devote the greatest amount of time to their children. Apart from concern about her children's studies, Ah Tzi thinks that doing revision together with the children has another meaning:

It is important to do revision with them. Accompanying them in revision will not only help them but make them feel that their mother cares about them and thinks they are important. If the mother regularly ignores her children's examinations, they will think that she does not care about them and does not think these things are important. I do not want my children to think this. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

When the children feel their parents' love and devotion, they will value and respect them. In this way, the relationship between them will be better.

Is it a must for the children to be taken care of by the mother? All the interviewees insist that the mother is the best person to take care of the children. If the children are not taken care of by the mother personally, it will be a loss to them:

When the mother is a housewife, the children have a childhood with care. If the mother goes out to work, the childhood years will be deficient. After all, from earliest infancy the child associates less with the father than with the mother. If the mother goes out to work when the child is small, then the time it spends with the mother will be reduced. This is not a normal relationship. Children like to follow their mother because the mother is the safest person for them—they come from the mother's inside. If the mother goes out to work, then the child will not have the opportunity to associate with the mother at a stage when it most needs her. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

Man Wah thinks that the mother should be with her children during their growth. Only in this way can their childhood be relatively perfect. The mother is the most suitable person to take care of the children. Even the children's father is not the best candidate:

If you really love your kids, your heart will ache when you let your husband take care of them and your ignorant husband cannot do it well. You will say, "I had better do it myself!" It does not mean that I will do everything and my husband will do nothing. After marriage, I will demand my husband's help in taking care of the children. But the point is that the driving force of childcare is me. Maybe it is because from childhood I have absorbed the concept that children are best looked after by their mother. (Ah Nei, 21 years old)

Under the influence of traditional gender stereotypes, the interviewees think that men are not very suitable for childcare, because the father has to play the instrumental role responsible for earning money to support the family, whereas the mother plays the expressive role of taking care of the children.

Some interviewees suggest that their children may be taken care of by their grandparents, because they have the experience of bringing up children. But other interviewees think their parents are already getting old, and looking after grandchildren requires a lot of physical and mental energy. They do not want them to work too hard. So they think they had better take care of their children themselves:

I will look after my children personally. Many people turn them over to their grandparents. Though the grandparents may love them and dote on them, they are not their own children after all. The grandparents may not be strict enough with the kids, while the parents may. So it is better if I take care of them myself. I will give them a severe ticking off if it is called for. I do not want them to be spoiled by their grandparents. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

When the mother takes care of the children personally, she may correct them as soon as they do something wrong and make them understand what is wrong, thereby instilling proper values into them.

The interviewees find it most difficult to accept the idea of their children being looked after by a maid. They think that it is not safe for their children to be looked after by a Filipina maid, because there have been instances of children being abused by maids. And when they are taken care of by a maid, it is difficult for the parents to build up a close relationship with them and they may

become alienated from them. This is not a normal parent-child relationship:

Now many children are taken care of by Filipina maids. They will not have the feeling of home. They are close to neither their mother nor their father. The relationship between the family and the maid is just monetary. I think a family needs someone to defuse this kind of situation. (San San, 20 years old)

Leaving the children to the care of the maid will affect the parent-child relationship. The interviewees are also concerned about the way the maid may take care of the children:

I once babysat for somebody. It is great fun to play with a kid, but you will feel very impatient and bothered when it is naughty or when it falls ill. If it is your kid, you will lovingly persevere in taking care of it, no matter how hard it is. But if you are just a maid, and you are feeling bothered or impatient, you may do heaven-knows-what to it—you may hit it or neglect it. Children are not always lovable; as a matter of fact, they are unlovable most of the time. Since they are a nuisance most of the time, only those who are related to them by blood will really lovingly and conscientiously take care of them. So I do not intend to hand my children over for the maid to look after. (Ah Yan, 23 years old)

Only parents who are related by blood to the children will have the patience to look after them well. So the mother had better take care of her children herself.

The interviewees think that they are the most suitable people to look after their children, which would indicate that they have strong maternal feelings. They think that men and women differ in their ability to take care of children, and that women are more suitable for this task. Neither will any proxy do, for the mother's care is best for her children's growth.

The birth of a child may influence the marital relationship. The most direct change is the change from being a couple to being parents so that their love for each other changes:

Romantic love will become devotion, that is, deep affection. Before marriage, what is between the two parties may be just romantic love, which is, however, superficial passion. The concepts of passion and devotion feature in the matriculation curriculum of Chinese Language and Culture. When a



family is started, love can't be so superficial. When both parties share children, passion may grow into devotion. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

The devotion mentioned by Man Wah is mutual and involves both love and solicitude, a more enduring kind of love, whereas passion is more superficial. After the arrival of children, the marital relationship will be transformed into mutual devotion. In reality, most of the interviewees think that after the birth of children, the greatest change between husband and wife will be in topics of conversation, which will revolve around the children—their life, growth, studies, etc. So, after the children's birth, the woman's relationship with her husband is governed by their status as parents of children, not just as a couple.

Apart from changes of conversational topic, there will be more family days and opportunities for the husband to take part in family activities:

There will be family days, when the husband, even though he may be very busy, may play together with his wife and children for the sake of the children. In this way, not only the relationship between the husband and the children, but that between me and my children and that between me and my husband will improve, for we will communicate better. (Man Man, 21 years old)

Many interviewees think that after having children, the husband will attach more importance to family, which will indirectly improve relations among family members. Ah Ting thinks that if her husband takes the initiative in communicating with the children, it is a manifestation of the importance he attaches to the children. And attaching importance to the children means attaching importance to the family, and attaching importance to the family means attaching importance to her. Similarly, Ah Yan expects her future husband to be devoted to the family:

Children are more distant from their father, because they grew in their mother's womb. If I take care of the children, I will be associating with them most of the time. But I also hope that the bond with their father will be close. When I was growing up, my father seldom got involved, but as his child I really yearned to be close to him. As his child, I could not make demands of him,

but I always wished my father would participate more in his children's life. So I hope my future husband will take the initiative in taking care of the children and playing with them. (Ah Yan, 23 years old).

Ah Yan tells us that the mother-child bond is far stronger than the father-child bond. So the interviewees hope that their future husbands will be more pro-active and dedicated to the familial relationship.

Nonetheless, some interviewees note that when their children are born, the range of topics of conversation of the couple may decrease and their relationship will become less intense. But most interviewees still think that this is beneficial rather than harmful. The tenderness they enjoy is not that between husband and wife but that between father and mother. The interviewees prefer this kind of relationship:

The family relationship will give me a sense of security. A family with children is more complete and the husband is less likely to be unfaithful. Though it is still possible, there is less chance of that happening than when there are no children. If there are no children, we will have no alternative but to divorce if my husband becomes involved with another woman. If there are children, our relationship will be better and I will feel more secure. (Siu Ping, 21 years old).

After the birth of the child, the husband-wife relationship will turn into a father-mother relationship, and most conversation will revolve around the third person—the child. In the course of time, a potential crisis will emerge—the conversational topics of the couple will gradually decrease. When the child is grown up, even conversation about the child will diminish and an empty-shell family will appear. This potential crisis is not likely to be discerned by the interviewees and anyway, it is not something they want to think about for the time being.

## Finding Fun in Housework

Interviewees who have a positive view of housework regard it as a kind of responsibility and obligation. Ah Nei points out that since housewives do not contribute to the family financially,

they have to contribute in terms of housework. Ah Ting thinks similarly:

Housework is what every family has to do. It is definitely there, to be done by someone. I have seen my mother doing it without any complaint. So if I can have a life like hers, I will already be very satisfied. (Ah Ting, 23 years old).

They are willing to do housework because it makes their home tidy and clean. When family members come back to a tidy home, they will be happier and live more comfortably. In their eyes, housework has its own value and fun. It can reduce stress and dispel sorrows:

Housework is not so hard. On the contrary, sometimes when I am exhausted by my studies, I do housework for relaxation. I love vacuuming and singing at the same time; I also love washing up, blowing bubbles and singing at the same time (Ah Yan, 23 years old).

Apparently, they glorify housework and regard it as a kind of game or entertainment, seeking fun from the process of doing housework.

Of course, if one can do housework properly, one will feel satisfied. Many interviewees do not think that housework is very monotonous and tiring. They would compare doing housework with working outside:

I don't think housework is very demanding. Compared with the stress of working outside, I think that it is very easy. (Ah Chi, 21 years old)

I have never hated doing housework. Housework is not so demanding as working outside. When the two of us get married I shall want to stay at home to do housework rather than find a job. This will be my contribution to the family. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

They are ready to do most of the housework themselves and they do not think that they will need a domestic helper. Although, as Glazer-Malbin (1976) points out, in a capitalist society, housework is regarded as a tedious chore, these interviewees think otherwise.

Four of them, however, have a more negative impression of housework, considering it to be tiring, dirty, monotonous and repetitive. However, when they become housewives, they cannot possibly ignore the problem. In their case, economic conditions permitting, they hope to hire domestic help.

## **Expectation of the Husband's Help with Housework**

Except for Ah Nei and An Tzi, all the interviewees expect their husbands to share the housework. Ah Nei thinks that when she becomes a full-time housewife, she will find it embarrassing to ask her husband to share the housework, and she will not be able to get him to do it anyway. Ah Tzi does not want anyone else to interfere with her housework and so will not require her husband's help:

I won't like doing housework together with my husband because it will just cause trouble. If I do it alone, I can control everything. If I do it together with my husband, I will have to let him take charge. If he does not do it well, I will have to moan at him. Eventually I will have to do it all over again. So I prefer to do it on my own. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

It can thus be seen that it is under the influence of the traditional concept of gender roles that Ah Tzi thinks that men are not suited to housework.

The other interviewees expect their husbands to help with the housework, but not on an equal basis:

Before my husband comes home, I will cook the dinner, sweep and mop the floor. But after the meal, we can share the work. For example, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, I will be responsible for doing the washing up; on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, he will be responsible. On Sundays, we will eat out. I do not want the man think that housework is none of his business. My father does housework conscientiously, too. I do not need my husband to do all the housework, but he should be able to help with basic housework such as washing up. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

Most of the interviewees hope their man can take the initiative with some of the housework, especially heavier work such as cleaning the windows and the kitchen ventilator:

It will be nice if he takes the initiative to help me. If he takes the initiative in order to lessen my workload, I will be happier. If I have to ask him to do it, then it means he is not minded to help me. He does it just because I ask him to. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

When their husbands take the initiative to do housework, they will be happier. Even washing the dishes brings them closer together.

Feminists advocate equal shares of housework. Most women, too, would like their husband to share housework equally with them. But the gender-role concept of these interviewees is more traditional. They do not think of sharing housework equally with their husbands. They do not expect their man to participate in most of the housework. Even if their man participates, it is only supposed to be of assistance. These women expect to undertake the majority of housework.

### Self-justification of the Interviewees

Although the interviewees think that being a housewife has its advantages, they also recognize its down side. But they do not mind much, and they are capable of self-justification, rationalizing their decision to be a housewife. In the process of their self-justification, the rules of family operation as proposed by Laing (1971) can be seen working. Relying on their husbands economically, housewives may be looked down upon by their husbands, but the interviewees do not mind. They think that housewives do contribute to the family. Although the contribution is not financial, doing housework well and taking good care of children are also a contribution to the family. So the husband should not look down upon the wife. Some interviewees even take reliance on their husband for granted:

Men should provide for women. (Ka Na, 21 years old)

If you are my husband, you have a duty to take care of me. (Ah Ying, 21 years old)

If the husband has any understanding of the hardships of his wife in doing housework, he should give her more housekeeping money so that she can afford to do what she wants. Housewives really have no income. If their husbands give them less money, they can only spend less. Women's housework has its worth, too. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

They assume that their husbands will support the family by paying them housekeeping money. They deny any possibility that their husbands

might fail to support the family, and they are not worried that their husbands might look down upon them on the grounds of their lowly status as housewives.

Only Ah Tzi considers that she will feel insecure if she completely relies on her husband economically, and that, if he leaves her, she will not be able to cope. But most interviewees avoid this question:

I fancy that I am going to marry him, that I love him very much and that he loves me very much. I don't want to think so negatively. I can't keep on working just because I fear divorce. I shouldn't be thinking in such a negative way. It is wrong. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

All the interviewees assume that their husbands will love them and provide for them. They prefer not to think about the problems which a housewife may have to face. Ah Ting imagines that she and her future husband will love each other very much. She refuses to contemplate the possibility of her husband divorcing her and convinces herself that she should not think too far ahead or worry too much about what has not yet happened.

Nonetheless, all the interviewees indicate that after marriage, they will save "private money". They unanimously think that "private money" is a kind of insurance, which they can rely on for their keep for a while, even after divorce. This "private money" is not only for themselves but also for the family:

My mother has never had a job. She has been relying on my father's income to maintain the family, but she has a lot of savings of her own. Around 1997, the economy of Hong Kong was in recession and father lost his job. At that time, mother supported the family with her personal savings. "Women save money of their own so that they can support their family when their man is in trouble". To put it another way, wives save money of their own not for themselves but as a reserve for the family. When their husband is in trouble, the family may be sustained for a couple of years with this sum of money. My family is like that. So I think it is necessary to save money of one's own, whether for one's own sake or for the family. (Ah Nei, 21 years old)

Saving money of their own enables women to feel secure. When their family is in difficulty, they are ready to take out this sum of money in

order to overcome the challenge. It can thus be seen that they are concerned for their family.

Housewives may become cut off from the world, but most interviewees are not worried about this problem. They will have the initiative to develop contacts and follow events closely by reading newspapers, going online and reading. Now that access to information is so easy and they are well educated, they are not worried about this problem. Ah Ting compares herself with her mother:

For the time being, I don't have to worry about this issue. I am educated, unlike my mother, who is an uneducated housewife and almost totally isolated. As a housewife, I will also surf the net, read newspapers and assimilate information, unlike housewives of my mother's era. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

Moreover, the social network of housewives is usually narrower, because those who work outside the home can get to know people from different walks of life; housewives can only come into contact with other housewives and stallholders at the food market. The interviewees do not deny that working would help them get to know more people, but they query whether friends made at the workplace would be genuine:

Although you can get acquainted with many people by going out to work, are those people really your bosom friends? I think not necessarily. There is always a kind of self-interest in relationships between colleagues. The fact that you know them does not mean that you can become great friends. Although the circle of housewives is narrow, they will know the neighbours, and there is no conflict of interest. Socializing with such friends will be more relaxed. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

So they think there will not be much opportunity to make true friends in a working environment. In any case they feel that it will still be possible to maintain contact with their current friends when they become housewives. Moreover, a job is not the only way to make friends. San San thinks that it is also possible to make friends at adult-education classes, friends who will be even better than those made at work. So there is no need to worry about a narrowing social circle.

Moreover, housewives will not have the experience of being at work and seeking promotion. Because the career ambition of all the interviewees is not strong and they do not pay much attention to this issue, they will not miss such experiences:

Actually, I am not a very career-minded person. Even if I work, I will not worry about whether it is a stable job and I will never seek promotion. I am never ambitious, and I don't care much about such things. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

Although some of the interviewees recognize the negative impact of being a housewife, they think that priority has to be given to family after marriage: compromise for the sake of the family is inevitable:

Eventually you will be occupied in taking care of your children and won't have time to think. When I have kids, I want to take care of them. (Ka Na, 21 years old)

Ka Na does not want to think much about the problems that housewives may face; she only wants to focus on taking care of her children. Although some interviewees recognize these potential problems, for example, their husbands may lose respect for them and leave, they think these things will not actually happen to them. Although Siu Ping thinks that as a housewife, she may miss out on many experiences, she still thinks:

If my husband is really capable and I don't have to worry about money, I think that it is all right to be a housewife. Of course, the prerequisite is that my husband loves me very much and is very committed to our family. (Siu Ping, 21 years old)

When imagining the future division of housework, the interviewees clearly recognize what they may lose out by being housewives. They all assume that their husbands will provide for the family, will always provide for them and will always love them. So they do not worry and do not even consider the consequences, assuming that nothing bad will happen to them, saying that one should not think too far ahead. It can thus be seen that when weighing the pros and cons of being a housewife, they make use of a series of

defence mechanisms, trying their best not to think about negative issues, in order to justify their decision to be housewives.

Here, the self-justification expressed by Aronson (2004) may be applied to explain the thinking of the interviewees. When a person has two different ideas, cognitive dissonance will result. Self-justification will be applied in order to reduce the stress caused by dissonance. The interviewees have two ideas: first, it is possible that housewives have to face up to many problems; second, they expect to lead happy lives as housewives after marriage. The emergence of these two ideas leads to cognitive inconsistency. As a result, the interviewees justify themselves: bad things will not happen to me. As a matter of fact, they do not face the issue squarely; they just rationalize their decision to be housewives by way of self-justification.

To apply Laing's (1971) rules of family operation, the interviewees want to play the happy-housewife game. They deny the problems that a housewife may have to face, and avoid thinking about them, in order to convince themselves that it is very pleasant to be a housewife. They magnify and romanticize the merits of being a housewife and refuse to see the problems that housewives often have to deal with.

## **Work Is Not More Attractive than Family**

### **Conflict Between Work and Family**

Nowadays many women continue working after marriage and are even intensely dedicated to their work so that they spend little time with their family. Most of the interviewees criticize this, pointing out that, if women are so obsessed with their career after marriage, they will neglect their family, and relationships will suffer. Consequently their children will go astray and it will be difficult to form a close relationship with them. More importantly, the interviewees think that this is irresponsible behaviour. When one is married, one has an obligation to take care of one's family and children. They even think that such people are not suited to marriage:

I think this is no good. If they are not prepared to devote themselves entirely to the family, they should not get married in the first place. This is bad for their husband as well as for their children. One of my friends is like this. She dedicates all her mental energy to work. As a result, her husband is having an affair. Although this is not completely her fault, she is responsible to a certain degree. If she had not completely neglected her husband, if her husband had been able to derive satisfaction from their relationship, he would not have resorted to a second woman. (Ah Chi, 21 years old)

With her friend's experience as an example, Ah Chi justifies her decision not to work full time after marriage.

Generally, the interviewees think that working full time will have a negative impact on the family. However, their family would enjoy a sizable income if, armed with their university qualifications, they went out to work like their husbands. However, they do not consider a double income for the family very attractive. Money is not the most important thing to them. If the cost of a higher income is neglect of the family, it is not worth it, because family and children cannot be satisfied just materially.

Material needs are indispensable but if you only care about your work, you will lack communication with your children. I think spiritual satisfaction is more important than material satisfaction. (Man Man, 21 years old)

Each of us will have an income of more than ten thousand Hong Kong dollars, so that we can afford seven to eight thousand Hong Kong dollars for our children to study and develop their interests. However, bringing up a person takes more than money. It requires energy, time and mental effort, which I think are more important. (Ah Nei, 21 years old)

Although money can bring material satisfaction to the family, bringing up children does not depend on money alone. What is more important is spiritual nurturing.

### **Why Do They Dislike Working?**

Most of the interviewees have a negative impression of work. Except for Ah Yan and Ah Ying, who indicate that they will reconsider working full time when their children are grown up, the other ten do not consider this option. All of them



think that work is tiring and stressful. Ka Na illustrates from her part-time work experience:

There's a great deal of pressure at work nowadays. I had a part-time job once. My boss was awful. He exploited his employees and often made us work overtime without extra pay. I was just a part-time worker. (Ka Na, 21 years old)

Many interviewees mention exploitation at work and the lack of extra pay for overtime, etc. They object to nine-to-five jobs on the grounds that they are very monotonous and mechanical.

In addition, workplace relationships are also one of the reasons why they do not want to work after marriage:

I don't like complicated personal relationships—backbiting, telling tales behind people's backs—in which there are no genuine friends at all. (San San, 21 years old)

If I go out to work in the future, the people I encounter may all be deceitful and scheming. In other words, "you make life hell for me, and I stab you in the back in order to get promotion". This is all very tiresome office politics that I don't want anything to do with. (Siu Pun, 22 years old)

Because they do not want to waste their time at workplaces which are riddled with duplicity and conspiracy, they are all the more convinced of their unsuitability for work:

This society is very complicated and full of suspicion and duplicity. I am not very suited to going out to work. In contrast, no one wants to harm you at home, and there cannot possibly be any conflict of interests. At work, your colleagues will stab you in the back, in order to get promoted, whereas your family definitely will not do so. (Ah Chi, 21 years old)

Their career ambition is not strong. Even if they go out to work, they will only aim at a stable job and will not seek promotion. In other words, they do not have the ambition to climb up the career ladder. More importantly, they think it is very difficult to find a job that is both interesting and satisfying. On the contrary, it would be very easy to experience alienation at work. These factors deter them all the more from seeking a full-time job.

When asked what they would consider working for, the ten interviewees almost without hesitation say they would only do it for money. They think that work is just a way to earn money.

None of them would work for a sense of achievement or satisfaction.

Although some of the interviewees admit that a sense of achievement and satisfaction may be derived from a successful career, they think it is less than what they would get from raising a family. The difference between work and family lies in the fact that:

The satisfaction you derive from a task is different from that derived from managing your home well. The satisfaction and joy you derive from a task may be quickly forgotten. But at home, this feeling may be long-lasting. When you see your children grow up and accomplish things, you will be very happy. Maybe even after more than 10 years, you will still feel very satisfied: "Look how well I have brought up my children". But when you complete a task at work, you will only celebrate it for a little while; the satisfaction of that moment cannot last. (Ka Na, 21 years old)

I think a sense of achievement in work cannot be maintained for long. If your boss praises you, "You've done well today", I think it just brings a momentary satisfaction. But the children's studies bring long-term satisfaction. Many parents compare their children's academic results with those of their friends and relatives, and may want to flaunt their children's academic achievements, for example, "My daughter has got into university". Some relatives will then be full of admiration, "Good for you, my children are not doing well at their studies". I think the sense of achievement derived from children's studies can bring parents a lot of joy. (Man Wah, 21 years old)

The satisfaction derived from family and children will be more enduring than that obtained from work. Moreover, the spiritual satisfaction brought about by family members' academic achievements cannot be derived from work. Thus they yearn to become housewives and to find a sense of achievement and satisfaction in that.

### **Interviewees Who Want to Return to the Labour Market**

Both Ah Yan and Ah Ying hope to return to the labour market after their children grow up. Their view of work is obviously different from that of the other ten interviewees. They praise work:

I enjoy having a job. It brings me not only money, but also the company of friends and colleagues, greater knowledge, a sense of satisfaction and achievement. When you complete a job, you feel a great sense of achievement. Once I organized an

activity and was terribly busy. But when the activity was over, and when I saw that the result was good, I felt very satisfied. So work involves satisfaction, money and friendships (Ah Yan, 23 years old).

Although they understand that work is very tiring and stressful, they think that it is a good opportunity to toughen oneself up. Although Ah Ying recognizes that workplaces are full of duplicity and conspiracy, she thinks that, provided she gets more experience, she will be able to handle these problems. It can thus be seen that their view of work is relatively positive. Nonetheless, because their first priority is the care of their children, they can only join the labour market when their children are grown up. Even then, they will still attach a lot of importance to their family. They hope to devote half their time to their family and become mothers, taking care at the same time of work and family.

## The Purpose and Significance of Attending University

### Attending University Is Not for Getting a Job

Many interviewees think that going to college nowadays is not entirely for the purpose of getting a job. Only a small portion of the interviewees think that going to college enables them to find a better-paid job in the future. But most of the interviewees chose to go to college not for this reason; they just think that going to college is the best path.

Like other university students, I entered university “naively” through the examination system. As this path is generally considered to be the best, one of course wants to take it if one is qualified. (Ah Yan, 23 years old)

They go to college not for their job, nor for a Bachelor’s degree but for the enjoyment of the experience of university life:

Going to college is neither for its result nor for the degree but for the process. College life has its own good fun. (San San, 20 years old)

Many interviewees chose their major not entirely out of career considerations but based on their own interest:

I like Chinese not for finding a job but for fun. Many people think that the career for graduates in Chinese is teaching, but, frankly, I hate teaching. So I didn’t choose my major with career in mind. (Ah Tzi, 21 years old)

The choice of a major has a significant bearing on the later choice of career. But when the interviewees chose their major, they mainly considered what interested them rather than their future career.

To this group of interviewees, who hope to get married and give birth to children before the age of thirty, they hope to leave work when their children are born and become full-time housewives, which means that their career will only last a couple of years. Nonetheless, they do not think it is a pity that they have to invest so much money and time before they can get a degree:

I am a woman. It would be a waste for a man but not for a woman. I very much admire women who do this—being a full-time housewife. I would also admire myself for being able to do so in the future. I do think that it would be a regrettable waste. It would be a waste for a man not to work after graduation. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

Ah Ting thinks that the ultimate aim of women is family. The other interviewees do not consider it a pity to work for only a few years. On the contrary, they think that they are lucky if they do not have to work. In addition, the knowledge acquired at university does not have to be applied to work in order to avoid being wasted. In their opinion, they can benefit from the knowledge picked up at the university of life. Ah Yan, who has been an exchange student overseas, relates the following:

Only Hong Kong people think this way (i.e., going to college and not working after graduation is a waste). When I was overseas, a friend came over after the Christmas holidays and announced, “Ah Yan, I am engaged”. It was only then that I realized that this kind of thing is very common abroad. Many people are engaged before graduation, and they get married after the graduation ceremony. They do not think that after studying so hard one should not get married and have children. Only Hong Kong people would think so. I don’t think my years of study will be wasted. The purpose of studying is to prepare for life, to make my thinking more comprehensive and mature. I do not necessarily have to use these skills and knowledge to make money. Just making money with the skills

I have learnt does not mean that I am a smart girl. Instead, what I learnt is supposed to make my future life happier and more meaningful. If this kind of happiness and meaning can be derived from marriage and childbearing, why should I abstain from them? Why should I think that it is foolish? Why should I think that it is useless? (Ah Yan, 23 years old)

Some interviewees think that studying is a kind of security:

I think studies are necessary, because I cannot be sure that I can get married. If I can't get married, I will be on my own. Moreover, I can't guarantee that my husband will be able to earn a lot. If he does not earn enough, I will have to go out to work. And I can't guarantee that there will never be a problem between me and my husband. I have to make sure that I am qualified to find a good job and I can survive on my own, should there be any problem. In addition, apart from my future family, I have my original family to look after. So I should study. (Ah Chi, 21 years old)

If her husband provides for her, she does not have to make use of her education at work; whereas if her husband does not provide for her, she can also work, armed with her qualifications. So academic qualifications are a kind of insurance.

### **The Value of Formal Schooling to the Family**

Although the interviewees do not intend to apply their studies to a job, they may apply them to their family. Given their education, if they stay at home to take care of their children after marriage, they can help with their children's studies. Even when their children are in secondary school, these women will be able to help with their studies. Moreover, they can also help to explore their children's talents:

I can teach my children. They may consult me when they have to do homework. Moreover, I will be wise enough to enrol them in interesting courses, quite unlike my mother in her time, when she knew nothing. If I notice my children are talented in painting, I will be wise enough to send them to a painting class. (Ah Ting, 23 years old)

Since they think that their education is useful to their future family, going to college is significant for them, especially in respect of the cultivation of their children.

## **Conclusion**

In Hong Kong, families with dual-income are becoming more and more common, and more and more highly educated women enter upon a career. People are already accustomed to this.

However, our interviewees have another idea, which is to become full-time housewives. Others may think that their way of thinking is illogical. Although the interviewees recognize the various problems they may have to face as housewives, they make a number of assumptions—their husbands will love them, will provide for them and will care for their family. As regards negative things, the approach they most often adopt is not to worry, not to think too far ahead, and to assume that things will not go wrong for them. When they visualize their marital life, they imagine only a happy family. Each one assumes that she will be a happy housewife, who will be able to enjoy her husband's love without any work pressure.

When they visualize the lives they will lead with their husbands and children, their faces are from time to time wreathed in smiles. Even the simple mental picture of picking up their children from school will make them feel happy and contented. They, however, unreservedly criticize the dark side of work, revealing discontent at being exploited by employers. And they despise women who only care about career and have no time to take care of the family, and denounce them as irresponsible. When they think about not having to work after marriage, they seem very excited and elated. So from simple observation of their speech, tone and even facial expressions, there is no mistaking their yearning for family life and dissatisfaction with work.

Moreover, they often explain their desire to be housewives by way of comparison. When they reflect on why they want to be housewives, they compare being housewives with working full time: with full-time work, the time available for taking care of the family is reduced. When they reflect on why they will not choose to work full time, they also compare working full time with

doing housework—it is very difficult to take care of the family while working. They also compare a full-time job with housework, pointing out that a full-time job is tiring and without freedom, whereas housework is autonomous and freer. When talking about why they want to take care of their children personally, they compare the way they would take care of their children with the way their husband or relatives or maid would do it, thereby highlighting the advantages of their personally taking care of their children. It can thus be seen that their desire to become housewives is based on regular comparison and weighing up the issues.

When talking about their yearning to become housewives, the focus of the interviewees is personal relationships—those with their husbands and children. Many studies discuss why women want to be housewives, but seldom explore their relations with their husbands and children or the inner world of women. The interviewees point out that what is so precious about being a housewife is being able to witness the gradual growth of children—from total ignorance to adulthood. They think that watching children grow and develop is a very satisfying thing, but the existing literature seldom talks about this aspect.

The interviewees have different views from those of sociologists or feminists. In general sociologists think that it is unwise to be a housewife for it means loss of power in marriage as well as an obligation to do monotonous housework. In contrast, the interviewees think that being a housewife is admirable and enjoyable. Glazer-Malbin (1976) thinks that, in a capitalist society, housework has no value. Moreover, housework is monotonous and disagreeable. But some of the interviewees think that housework is very worthwhile, and they even regard doing housework as a stress-releasing activity which they enjoy.

Moreover, feminists think that men and women should equally share housework, as women expect men to do. But some of the interviewees do not want their man to share the housework. They only expect their husband occasionally to take the initiative to help, thereby showing that he cares about his wife. It can thus be seen that what

those women value is mental willingness rather than physical sharing of housework. As regards childcare, feminists are of the view that both men and women have the right to go out to work. In their view, parents may compensate for the reduction in time available for childcare by increasing the quality of that care. The children's day-to-day care may be left to the maid. However, what the interviewees stress is quantity. Often they mention the issue of time and point out the importance of time to the family. Work reduces their time spent at home, so they do not want to work. As full-time housewives, they will have the maximum amount of time for their children.

The point of view of the interviewees and the views expressed in the literature differ from each other as if the interviewees were having a debate with sociologists and feminists. But it is very difficult to decide who wins and who loses. What is worth considering is whether the view of sociologists concerning women as housewives doing the housework is too negative. Is their understanding of the life of housewives insufficient?

It is worth noting that most of the studies have been performed by Western scholars, while the interviewees in this chapter are from Hong Kong; cultural difference may lead to a difference in perspective. Traditionally, women are portrayed as tender, caring and ready to sacrifice for their family. Under the influence of these traditional concepts, the interviewees think that any sacrifice is worthwhile for the care of their children. For example, advertisements nowadays reinforce these traditional thoughts. In the advertisements, the soft side of women is usually emphasized. Advertisements for household appliances all highlight the joy of housewives in doing housework. What these advertisements display to us is the image of a family woman. Women seldom appear as managers in business organizations. It can thus be seen that although Hong Kong is already modernized, it still has a traditional flavour. In contrast, modernization and gender equality are more popular in the West. Women in Western society think that housework should be shared between men and women, but Hong Kong women still think that housework is women's work. As a result of this cultural difference,

some of the attitudes put forward by Western scholars in the literature are different from those of the interviewees of this study.

These interviews have given rise to quite a few points for reflection. The interviewees often stress that it is hard to attend to both work and family at the same time. Likewise Hochschild (1989) says that women with a double burden are in a most difficult position. Recognizing the pressures of a double burden, the interviewees do not want to work full time, and they think of an alternative—becoming full-time housewives. Not having to bear the pressure of a double burden, housewives can lead a more comfortable life, which is what the interviewees aspire to.

Their criticism of work is in fact a kind of criticism of society, too. Nowadays, the opportunities for women to receive education have greatly increased. In workplaces, more and more women enjoy high salaries and positions. Modern people devote themselves to work and seek satisfaction from work. But no matter how developed society is and however much equality is achieved in the public domain, the interviewees do not yearn to work. Although they acknowledge that satisfaction can be obtained from work, they think that this is a temporary rather than permanent state of affairs. After grasping the nature of work, they justify their decision to become housewives by taking refuge in the traditional posture of “men outside, women inside”, in order to escape from the workplace. In short, what really attracts them is the establishment and enhancement of personal relationships. Housewives can take care of their children for long hours, thereby enhancing their relationship with their children, and can personally witness the growth of their children. Only this sense of achievement is enduring and even life-long.

In contrast, the more the modernized society becomes, the more importance people attach to the pursuit of studies, career and money, the lonelier they feel. If they neglect personal relationships, they will feel empty at heart. To a certain extent, the interviewees criticize this social phenomenon. When people keep slaving away, they may obtain satisfaction in terms of career and

money, but they lose the close relationship with their partner and children. Just because the interviewees are highly educated, it does not mean that they have to apply what they have learnt to their career. In their mind, nothing can compare with their relationship with their family, especially that with their children.

This chapter not only explores the reasons why female undergraduates desire to become housewives, but also seeks to understand their attitude to life or the meaning of life. This we have done by listening to their aspirations, thereby providing us all with a space for reflection.

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Eva Yu Mui-ling

*I have worked for very many years, brought up two kids and purchased a flat. All I have to show for my labours is the loss of a few kilos. Now I have a family. So long as my family are happy, I am content.*

The advantage of working in a strange place, migrant labourer Hong Ming makes plain—the most important reason why migrant labourers work in unfamiliar places—is that it is all for the happiness of their family. Even if they shed a few kilograms, they don't mind. For the sake of their family many migrant labourers leave their familiar home village, the place where they grew up in order to find work in the big city, where they hope to realize their dreams.

Home can be a cosy nest as well as a prison. Home can be a cradle nurturing dreams as well as an oppressive place in which hopes are stifled. A change of home can allow people to break free of the family's watchful eye. But departure brings the shadow of the family from one geographical space to another, so that the family continues to exist in the life of the individual. Imagination enables the individual to construct attractive plans for the future, to keep on hoping, transcending the limitations of time and space. This chapter attempts to explain the migrant labourers' dreams and their decision to leave. It listens to the reasons for their decision and for their desire to create an alternative future in unfamiliar surroundings.

Every year when the lunar new year is approaching, tens of thousands of migrant labourers are shown on television gathering at the railway stations of certain mainland Chinese cities, such as Beijing, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, waiting overnight for the trains which will take them home for the festival. Clutching their parcels, they crowd together in the long queues for tickets. The scene is deeply engraved in my mind and I used to wonder, "Why do they leave their home village to travel thousands of miles and work in another town?"

This question remained unanswered until my final year at university when I had to plan for my future career and began to ask myself, "How am I going to earn my living?" While I was pondering potential careers and future working environments, I thought of "family", including the economic situation of my family, my family's expectations, and the changes to the family which would be brought about by my work, which gradually formed a picture of the future.

As I thought about those migrant labourers living away from their home village, I drew up the exploratory framework of this chapter: How do migrant labourers imagine their future lives in unfamiliar places?

Just like the Chinese who migrated to foreign countries such as Southeast Asia and San Francisco in search of gold, today's migrant workers are drawn by the hope of making their fortune in foreign lands. Migration stories depicting a hopeful future encourage villagers yearning for change to make the decision to migrate (Chan

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and Chiang 1994). Are those migrant labourers who are prepared to buy expensive train tickets shadows of the Chinese who went to San Francisco in the old days?

This decision to leave home to look for “gold” is not only a personal decision but also closely connected with the needs and expectations of the family. The migrant often leaves home in the hope of making the whole family and the whole village proud. This belief becomes a driving force behind the decision to go and toil in unfamiliar surroundings (Chan and Chiang 1994). Those Chinese who went to Southeast Asia and San Francisco have become the reference group for those villagers who subsequently decided to move there. The reference group is a group which we adopt as the standard for our thoughts and actions (Berger 1963). The reference group influences the decision to migrate because human beings have always been different individuals living collectively together. The individual, even in his innermost experience and in his dreams and yearnings, has to rely on the collective, and be a product of his environment. In any place, we will see individuals expressing the same yearnings and uniting to help each other out. Thus they hope to cope jointly with difficulties in life and to confront them shoulder to shoulder (Eucken 2005).

Studies of the Chinese who migrated to San Francisco find that their decision to migrate was closely connected with the reference group and the family. Are southbound migrant labourers similar to the Chinese who migrated to San Francisco? How could these migrant labourers have made the decision to leave their home and settle in some remote spot, enduring problems of adjustment, misfortune, and suffering in daily life? At different stages, how have their dreams been transformed? What vision do they have of the future?

The above questions have prompted me to identify with the migrant labourers and understand their changed perceptions. The point of departure of this study is to try to find out how a group of people made up their minds. This will help to answer questions about the self, about the imagination.

## The Literature

### Transformation

Everyone seeks the meaning of life in the world in which they find themselves. The southbound migrant labourers see the limitations of living permanently in a rural area, and think that it will be more satisfying to live in a prosperous city such as Shenzhen. Instead of merely relying on their fellow villagers’ descriptions, they prefer to experience life in the big city for themselves.

As individuals living in society, the migrant labourers stand at the centre of a series of concentric circles extending outward, each representing a social system. Living in various restrictive and controlling social systems, and given their inherited social position, it seems theoretically impossible for individuals to change throughout their lives (Berger 1963). The concentric circles of the migrant labourers are the prosperous society of Shenzhen and their kinship group back in their home village. As their social position is limited by their *hukou*<sup>1</sup>, female workers in Shenzhen indicate that Shenzhen *hukou* enjoys more security, and that they are just transients. Their old social systems, mainly their parents and relatives in their home village, make them feel that their hard working life in Shenzhen is worthwhile.

Social positions or social systems seem to restrict the migrant labourers, but the individual does not live passively behind social walls. Because social systems are created by humans, they can also be changed by humans. People may replace old meanings with new ones and act in ways not sanctioned by old conventions. Thus, society will undergo transformation as a result of the changing consciousness of the individual. Behind the walls of social systems, the individual may be transformed by social situations,

<sup>1</sup>*Hukou* is a system which identifies the people from rural or city.

breaking free from the confinement of old norms, and build a new world of meaning (Berger 1963). Migrant labourers are individuals who think actively. For example, a female worker said that in her home village, as all women with children remain at home to take care of their parents-in-law and children, her failure to stay and take care of her family was difficult to justify. Immediately after that, however, she said that society now is so different from the past that it will not do to rely solely on the husband. If husband and wife both go out to work they can make more money and give a better life to their children. Although she faces the pressure to conform to traditional norms, she manages to construct a new definition of the “good wife” and the “good mother”.

### The Future Is Now

This female worker confirmed her status and expressed a view different from the conventional one. The individual is transformed by past experience which influences the individual’s future choices; the individual recalls past experience and relates it to her present situation. Our actions may be viewed in chronological sequence, so that past experiences inform future decisions. The female worker has worked in Shenzhen for 10 years. Ten years ago, she went to Shenzhen alone. Initially, she mainly wanted to experience this prosperous city for herself and widen her horizons. Marriage and accumulated experience have transformed the way she sees her decision to leave her home village. Her view is a product of experience and time, as well as the subtle effect of her own psyche.

The mind, as an intellectual domain, is able to control present behaviour in terms of the desired result or future behaviour. This, of course, distinguishes humans from animals. People with vision and reflective ability can clearly plan to realize their vision and draw on a specific past situation when deciding future behaviour. The greatest difference between humans and animals is that human beings can determine their behaviour right now based on how they envisage the future situation. The mind is influenced by the social process

and by experience passed on by the parents. We must thus bear the social background in mind when we try to comprehend individual internal experiences and interactions (Mead 1934). Female workers possess an independent mind that can determine their present moment according to their vision of the future. The decision either to leave their home village for adventure in Shenzhen or to raise children in the home village depends on how attractive they imagine the prosperous city to be and what it offers in terms of a better life for their children. This perception is defined by the time and space in which they find themselves.

### Time and Space

The reason why migrant labourers change their view of themselves and their family according to the time and space in which they find themselves is that humans live not only in social space but also in social time (see Berger and Berger 1983). A human’s past, present and future all occur against a specific social background, which is inseparably connected to time and space. Human beings accept and arrange, by way of their senses, perceptions and impressions from the external world, so that they have significance in a specific time and place. Similarly, in the past, migrant labourers made the decision to leave their home village for the south based on their fellow villagers’ recommendations. Their decision is closely influenced by their perception of the situation.

### Sociological Imagination and Hope

Human beings live on the boundaries of time and space and cannot break free from them. The individual’s imagination is capable of transcending time and space. Human perception of the past and future is an important characteristic of the imagination, which helps us to imagine things that have not yet happened. Therefore human beings remember the past and imagine the future of an incomplete history (Warnock 1994). Imagination

itself is the best tool with which we can change the world, but our imagination is sometimes offset and overcome by more powerful social circumstances. Imagination is usually about yearning for certain things which are not immediately available or understandable. We have the innate ability to make nonexistent things appear and existing things disappear (McBride 2005). A female worker I interviewed, Wan Rong, by imagining her future secure life, made the hardship of frequent overtime disappear and transformed it into a motivating force for her work.

The individual has a mind with which to imagine the beautiful future. On the other hand, Mills (2000) points out that human beings do not have the intellectual ability to understand thoroughly the interaction between the individual and society, between the individual life and history, and between the self and the world. As a consequence, humans often feel that their personal lives are full of traps which hinder them in dealing with the turmoil of life. What human beings need is the intellectual ability to use information for the improvement of reason, so that they may see human affairs clearly and grasp the whole scope of future developments. This ability is called sociological imagination, which is very meaningful to the individual's inner life as well as their external career, making it possible for human beings to see clearly a wider stage of history (Mills 2000). Wan Rong's vision of the future and her diligence are derived from her worry that she cannot be sure what the future holds. By way of imagination, she has ordered the relationship between her present endeavour and her future state—the now can change the future.

When individuals, with the help of social imagination, see clearly their historical circumstances, they will be able to construct their own hope. We live amidst joy and fear. Hope opens up for us a wider future and takes us away from the gloomy haze. Walter Pater thinks that human beings need their imagination to be stimulated in order to help shape an indeterminate hope and then to transform it into an effective hope, spurring them on year after year (see Crapanzano 2003, p. 9).

Theologically speaking, hope is very significant in various religions. Hope may be defined as a kind of waking dream, a collective concept, rich in expectations of utopia in the broadest sense. Hope is also creative use of the imagination (Desroche 1979). This expectation of the future is not unique to Wan Rong. In the factory in which she works, many of her home villagers share similar expectations that their family will lead a better life.

## Family and Migration

Family, as a social institution composed of different individuals, exerts great influence on its members. The Chinese strongly stress the importance of family. The ancient Chinese sages already advocated “cultivating the self and regulating the family”. The concept of family cannot be overestimated in Chinese society. Throughout history, the Chinese have often had to migrate as a result of war and famine. Civil wars in modern times also made many people seek refuge in Hong Kong. It seems that the Chinese have long become accustomed to migration (Chan and Seet, Ch. 3 in this handbook). The best way of coming to terms with leaving the family is for people to tell themselves: “This is for the family”. Under the major premise of “familial well-being”, all pains brought about by migration are worthwhile (Chan and Seet Ch. 3 in this handbook). Female factory workers often mention their family, especially their children—for example, how lovely their son is. Even things their sons say to them were divulged unreservedly. As they are telling their stories, they smile and sometimes even weep.

Family is not only a concrete entity but also an internalized concept. Family is full of ambivalence. The decision to migrate brings the family benefits, but the family also has to pay a “price”. In particular, when migration is studied against the background of Chinese society, family is a factor that cannot be ignored. The family and migration are studied against the background of Chinese society and culture. Migration seems to enable the individual to leave the powerful net of

family and trigger off another round of visits home. Migration makes family members cease living under the same roof and relocates them to different spaces though they still share the idea of family, which they have a part in constructing.

When the migrant labourers find work far from their home village their family income increases, and the price paid by the family is that its members cannot live together. Though they have left their home village, the intimate feeling of “home village” and “fellow villagers” is a daily topic of conversation among migrant labourers in the factory. Though they have physically left their home, their heart is still attached to the family.

The family plays an important role in making the decision to migrate. It can thus be seen that the individual is inseparable from the family. Although the individual is like a kite freely flying in the air after departure, the family is the string which determines how far and how high the kite can fly (Chan, Ch. 2 in this handbook).

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### **The Current Situation: Studies of Chinese Migrant Labourers**

According to incomplete statistics, up till the end of 2006, the numbers of migrant workers from other provinces pouring into Guangdong province were about 19 million. The main places of origin are peripheral provinces such as Sichuan, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Guizhou, and Hebei. The main destinations are Pearl River Delta and its peripheral, economically prosperous region (Zhou 2005). According to a recent study conducted by Topic Group, Labour and Social Security Section, New China Net, there are 4.2 million migrant labourers in Shenzhen alone, which is situated on the Pearl River Delta.

In recent years, mainland Chinese academics have published a great deal of work on migrant labourers; scholars such as Li Qiang (2004), Yu and Ding (2004), Zhou (2005), Sa Lianxiang (2004), regard migrant labourers as a social problem, which they analyse and study within the framework of macroscopic social strata and systems. Sa Lianxiang studies the role of migrant

labourers from the perspective of social psychology. Zhou Daming tries to gather the strengths of different schools and make up for their shortcomings. He analyses different aspects of the issue of migrant labourers, mainly based on anthropology. All the studies look at the migrant labourers as a social group, with the social problem of the oppression of migrant labourers as their starting point.

Almost all the academics adopt a quantitative research methodology and reveal certain problems and tendencies. This chapter, however, tries to use a qualitative methodology, starting from a microscopic perspective, taking sociological aspirations as its theoretical basis, listening to the migrant labourers. It involves transforming the identity of myself as researcher, in order to enter the workplace of this social group, and become a listener to their stories, instead of a detached investigator.

Both the first generation and the second generation of migrant labourers come from the lower social stratum, experiencing role conflict, discrimination at the hands of urban residents and the hardships of working in a strange place. Why do peasants still leave their home village to go and settle in faraway places? What do they rely on in order to survive in the city? As thinking beings, are the migrant labourers actually happy to choose a path full of troubles? As they confront those troubles, what is in their mind?

In analysing the migrant labourers in the light of their social origins, their feelings may often be overlooked. This chapter tries to analyse the feelings of the migrant labourers from the perspective of sociology. They must experience happiness whilst coping with the misfortunes of life. This chapter attempts to find an opening in the many sociological studies of the migrant labourers. The aim is to listen to and share their desires, to transcend geographical barriers and cultural and age differences in a particular place and time. This will enable us to look back at the past, analyse the connection between the decision to leave their home village and their dreams for the family, establish how they imagine the city before going to work there, and then share their hopes for the future.



## Research Methodology

My research site is a Hong Kong knitwear factory in Shenzhen. As Shenzhen is one of the coastal migrant cities of China, most of the factory employees are not natives of Shenzhen, but migrant labourers from various provinces. Through the contacts of a relative, I was able to base myself in the Hong Kong factory for the interviews. This factory is located in the Nanshan district of Shenzhen. There are around 1,000 workers, almost 80% of whom come from places other than Guangdong Province. The factory mainly employs women. The proportion of men to women is about 1 to 2. The working day is 12 hours long. The factory provides accommodation for the workers. Basically the activity space of the migrant labourers is confined to the factory and the dormitory, and they seldom go out to have a good time.

This chapter relies on repeated in-depth interview. The interview provides a deeper understanding of the research subjects than is possible with a questionnaire. This method creates an easier atmosphere for interviewees to freely share what is in their mind. The natural interaction of question and answer enables a more detailed understanding of the interviewees' opinions and feelings.

Altogether 12 migrant labourers were interviewed for this study. The interview was conducted in Putonghua (Mandarin) (see the Appendix for the basic data of the interviewees). Each interview was 30-minutes long, face to face, and in-depth. As the interviewees' working hours were long and their pay was calculated by different methods, it was very difficult to fix an interview time. So I interviewed them while they were working. The advantage of this was that the interviewees could freely tell their stories in a familiar environment. It was also conducive to my observation, enabling me to participate in their experience, and allowing me to build trust with them. It created a platform for relaxed sharing and facilitated friendly communication and interaction.

## Analysis of Interview Data

### The Stimulus of Imagination

To leave the village where one grew up and find work far from home is an event laden with possibilities. The migrant labourers have not flocked to the city blindly looking for work opportunities. They have no clear image of life in the big city. This mental picture is usually informed by other people's accounts of their experiences. When those villagers who have gone to work in the city return home, they may not tell their fellow villagers about the difficulties they encountered. Instead they tend to talk up the benefits of urban life.

This sharing of positive experiences presents an attractive picture and influences the decisions of the young people back home:

At that time I saw some girls returning to the village from their jobs in Shenzhen, and they looked all right. I heard that there was good work there, and we weren't sure what it was like. So I wanted to go there, see what Shenzhen was like and benefit from it. (Wan Rong)

My interviewee Wan Rong from Sichuan has been working in Shenzhen for almost 16 years since 1989. At that time, only children of party comrades in the village were allowed to go and work in the city. Wan Rong was not put off by this. Instead, she rushed about applying for different kinds of documents. Finally she overcame all obstacles and left her native village. Recalling the reasons, she unhesitatingly mentioned the impression made on her by the reports of those who had left the village before her, which she described as "rather good". Envy had induced her to imagine the situation of Shenzhen as "beneficial". "Benefits to be drawn from Shenzhen" was what she thought about as she left her village and marched upon the city—she firmly intended to obtain the "benefits" she had heard about from the village people who had been there before her.

This belief in "benefits" does not belong to her alone. It is shared by a social group comprising individuals with similar backgrounds. The greatest

shared characteristic of the “reference group” of migrant labourers is their background. The unsatisfactory experience of migration has transformed the role of this group of people on the social stage. Ever since they crossed the village boundary they have been classified as “migrant labourers”. A collection of strangers have been transformed into a mutually caring social group, who are thrown together by the trials and tribulations of working in the city. But paradoxically, they would vividly depict to their fellow villagers the “benefits” of working and living out there.

The “romanticization” of work in the city by returning villagers fired Wan Rong’s imagination. She decided that she would like to taste the “benefits” she had heard about. This thought was transformed into concrete action. Wan Rong made every attempt to acquire the documents required for work in Shenzhen.

Yue Fang, another interviewee of mine working in the same workshop as Wan Rong, migrated in 1995 from her home in Shanxi to Shenzhen. With some amusement she recalled the way she had imagined it:

They all said that it was possible to earn a few hundred yuan a month out there. I had never dreamt of earning a few hundred yuan a month. At that time, I was particularly attracted to Guangxi, Liuzhou and Shenzhen,—very strongly attracted! The photo taken by my cousin in Liuzhou was incredibly beautiful! (Yue Fang)

Harbouring her “attraction” towards the “incredibly beautiful” city, Yue Fang left her home village and came to Shenzhen. Her image of the world outside her village was coloured by the “incredibly beautiful” picture that had so attracted her. When she laid eyes on the photo taken by her cousin, she not only registered the beauty of the scenery in the photo but also allowed it to colour her image of the city and the previously unimaginable income. Someone else’s somewhat over-egged account had become the experience she firmly believed would be hers.

Was it the richness of the women’s imagination that made them long to work in the city? No, the male interviewees’ imagination was also fired

by what they heard from other people, so that they constructed a highly optimistic vision of work in the big city and left their home village with this image in their minds.

At that time, I did not know what it was like outside. But my older brother was already here (in Shenzhen) and they said it was pretty good here. I thought the point of going so far from home was to make money, and nothing else mattered. So I came.... My brother and his wife wrote to me that our home village was linked up with some enterprise that was recruiting staff collectively. I then seized the opportunity to leave. (Hong Ming)

My interviewee Hong Ming already had a job in his home village. He did not speak Putonghua (Mandarin) well. (In fact, many residents of other provinces do not speak standard Putonghua. Their dialects are very different from Putonghua.) When Hong Ming, who had just got married, heard his older brother’s and sister-in-law’s experiences in the big city, he considered his situation at that time and imagined that working in the city could bring in a good income. And he was in a low-income social environment. Persuaded by his brother’s experience of earning a higher income in Shenzhen, he came up with the idea of going to work in the “quite nice” city.

The demeanour of the interviewees betrayed their belief that going to work in Shenzhen would improve their standard of living. When they were living in their home village, their social map was a kinship network, in which they played the roles of “daughter”, “son”, “wife”, and “husband”. Their income was not high and there was no way to increase it. When other people’s highly coloured descriptions of urban life became the stimulus, and their circumstances were not exactly the life they wanted, their minds began to wander afar. The urban lifestyle as described by other people was so appealing, so irresistible that they were won over, firmly expecting to enjoy a good income.

At that time, Hong Ming saw his own great future in terms of his brother’s experience. The power of imagination enabled these people to make a decision about their future. This was a

decision to leave, even though they had no independent evidence that they would enjoy the affluent lifestyle depicted by Hong's brother. Although they had never been to Shenzhen and had never carefully planned their careers, other people's experiences were sufficient to prompt them to consider migrating. The idea of leaving their home village was lent appeal by the attractive prospects awaiting them in the big city. Wan Rong, Yue Fang, and Hong Ming all discovered from a fellow villager's or relative's experience an opportunity to better themselves—to find work away from the village, which could raise their income as well as connect them with the prosperous city. This idea had become fixed in their minds before they left and prompted them to leave their village and work in Shenzhen. They hoped to carve out a new path in life and bring themselves and their family a better life.

### **The Construction of the Image and Leaving Home**

The way we imagine the future is based upon not only other people's experience but also on our own. The way the individual imagines the future informs the decision to leave, so that they can break through the confines of their present space, leave behind the network of kinship, and head for the city. Those who left earlier are the reference group for those who have not yet departed. The existence of this social group has become the source of imagination for migrant labourers. The formation of the mental image also requires the migrant labourers to take the initiative in constructing for themselves a hope, a vision of work in an unfamiliar place.

The desire to work in the city may be so powerful that it can overcome the family's objections. Take Wan Rong, for example. She imagined the girls from her village making a prosperous living in the beautiful surroundings of the city, but her parents did not approve of her leaving home to work. Young and energetic as she was, she left her home village fondly imagining a rosy future in the city:

When I left home to start a job in the city, my family did not agree. But I very much wished to carve out my path in life and see in what ways the outside world was different from home. I wanted to taste the delights of this life and see for myself how it felt to make money on my own rather than ask my parents for it. (Wan Rong)

Wan Rong comes from a well-to-do family. Her family owned a tangerine farm, which was able to bring them a good income. She could have stayed at home and enjoyed village life without having to worry about earning her living. But she did not want to ask her parents for money. So she decided to leave her family. "Carving out her own path in life" reveals the vision of the younger generation, which is different from that of the first generation who left home just to make a living. The younger generation leave their home village and make the decision to work in the city filled with dreams and hopes. What attracts them is the prosperity of the city. Compared to the monotonous rhythm of village life, the big city is exciting. The so-called "good income" of the village cannot be compared with the kind of money to be made in the city. As individuals capable of imagination, the migrant labourers aspire to realize their beautiful vision in the city, as seen from a particular place at a particular time. Finally they make the decision to leave:

At that time, like others who had gone away to work, I regarded Shenzhen very favourably. In my childhood, I had already dreamed of a life in the big city. My cousin would not let me go with her. She said, "Don't come—you could get into all sorts of trouble". I insisted on going, even though my husband did not want me to. (Yue Fang)

From the words of another interviewee, Yue Fang, it can be seen that even without the family's support, that longing to go and work in the city and the attractions of life in Shenzhen gave Yue Fang the resolve to leave her village, even at the risk of getting into trouble. There were two incentives encouraging Yue Fang to leave for the big city—first, the desire to join her husband who had moved to Shenzhen before her; secondly, to fulfil her childhood dreams of life in the world outside. This kind of ambition is a fantasy cultivated over

a period of years rather than a momentary impulse. Her decision then changed the family's way of life. Both husband and wife now go out to work and their child has to be raised by its grandmother. The reason why Yue Fang was able to face this kind of change was entirely because of her longing for city life:

At that time, my brother-in-law's sister said that the factory in which she was working was recruiting staff. And I heard that Shenzhen was very prosperous, a kaleidoscopic world, which I very much wanted to experience personally. Therefore, I decided to work in Shenzhen. (Yu Lian)

Yu Lian, who left her home village in Hubei in 1995, had stopped working three years into her marriage. At that time, her husband was the bookkeeper of a private company. She used to take care of her child at home and wait for her husband to return from work. She could have continued playing the dutiful wife and mother at home, without caring about what the external world was like. But she couldn't stop dreaming of the exotic life on offer in the big city and her desire to get a share of it prompted her to leave:

When I left, my parents did not accompany me to the railway station. They only saw me to the door. At that time, I had no idea. I carried my bag and thought only that it must be good fun. It was only when I arrived in the factory that I knew it was not good fun at all. (Ya Ming)

Ya Ming left his village in 1998. After leaving school, he went to learn tailoring in the county town. No sooner had he finished his apprenticeship at the age of seventeen than he left. He looked back on his experiences upon arrival in Shenzhen with mixed feelings—he almost failed to find a job in his new surroundings; the shoes bought for him by his mother were stolen; his boss kept his wages and would not let him resign; he had to work overtime and eat fast-food noodles every evening. Although work in the city was not much fun, he has been there for seven years, because:

Shenzhen is like a large stage on which you are granted the opportunity to act many roles. If you work hard enough there, you can develop new skills. We are engaged in technology, and the potential for development still exists. (Ya Ming)

This young man, who works as a “product tester” in a knitwear factory in Shenzhen, used to be an obedient son. On his mother's advice, he had intended to learn tailoring so that he would be able to carry on making clothes for people in his old age. However, in 1998 he left for Shenzhen together with several fellow villagers. The decision to leave home has enabled Ya Ming to construct new hopes and ambitions on the wider stage of Shenzhen and give full play to his potential. This amount of space and opportunity is not available to a tailor in the home village.

At that time, going south to work and fulfil one's dreams was sort of trendy. I looked forward to living in the city. Existence requires clothing, food, housing and transportation while life involves quality, and the expectation was to live freely and easily.

First, I wanted to find a better job here and make more money. Then I would be able to have my own career. This was my dream. (De Wen)

De Wen worked as a security guard in the factory. In 1993, he had migrated south from his home village in Hubei, to Shenzhen. He left the army in order to find work in Shenzhen, and, as a result of a wrong decision, he saw his monthly income fall from over 2,000 Hong Kong dollars to just a few hundred yuan. When asked about his feelings about working in Shenzhen, De Wen described the experience of migrant labourers in the city as “sad”.

When the migrant workers set off southwards in pursuit of their dream, and arrived in the city, a triple social model was created: peasants in the country; peasants in the big city; townspersons. The role of migrant labourer has changed them. They are not only citizens of a certain village but also migrants dwelling in the city. The migrant labourers no longer think in terms of their family being based in a certain village. Instead, as a result of the decision to leave, the notion of family stretches all the way to the big city. The way of life of the family has also changed. As a result of emigration, the playing out of the roles of father, mother, daughter and son is transferred to unfamiliar ground.

At the same time, the migrant labourers live contradictory lives. Harbours long-nurtured fantasies about life in the big city, they go to the city and start to play the unfamiliar role of migrant labourer, working at the factory. Regarded as “migrant labourers” in society, they can only rely upon kinship, descent and place of origin to find their place on the social map. For example, Yue Fang used to imagine that the multi-faceted world of Shenzhen was waiting for her. But when she found it difficult to find transport out of her home village, she soon realized that it was “not easy out there”. When she reached Shenzhen, she failed to find her husband and ended up wandering the streets, though eventually she found work at the factory. Working and living in the “no fun” city produces a contradiction between long-cherished fantasy and harsh reality. But this does not make the migrant labourers return to their home village. Why do they still remain in the city? The key lies in their dream, a dream of new horizons, which not only belongs to the individual but is also a collective dream of migrant labourers from different provinces.

## Imagination and the Family

It is not only a personal hope but also an attempt to fulfil the family’s expectations:

According to them, I was too small to make any money. I then decided that I would persist until I made some money, no matter how lonely I was. I did not have to face going back if I failed to make money. My uncle said, “Look at you. How could you possibly make any money? How long can you work out there?” I said that even if I did not work, I could still see what Shenzhen looked like. I did not earn much and I blinked back my tears. I did not go home because I was worried that they’d laugh at me. I was quite short and I didn’t want people to make fun of me. I told myself that I had to earn the travelling expenses apart from the money to be sent to mum and dad. (Wan Rong)

Her parents never directly suggested she should go, and even disapproved of her working in the city. Wan Rong, faced with her family’s disapproval and her uncle’s put-downs, simply

thought “if only I had the courage to go back and face them”. She felt that “When working far from home, one has to make money and send it back, otherwise one should not go home”. When Wan Rong first left home, she was just a young woman. Now she is already a mother. From her account, it can be seen that when she made the decision to go, she badly wanted to prove to her family that she was capable of looking after herself. “I may be small, but I can earn money all the same”, she kept telling herself. When she does make money, she will be able to prove herself to her family. So, as a girl in the alien surroundings of Shenzhen, she has put up with her homesickness:

When I first went out to work, I would cry on the quiet and would not let my fellow villagers know, in case they told my mother, who would then get worried. Once, I cried in front of the foreman. He said, “Get on with your work. When you’ve earned enough money, you can go home”. I thought he was right and I stopped crying. (Wan Rong)

Going away in order to make money and send it home is not a personal but a collective decision. When Wan Rong missed home, she was kept going by the conviction that she had to earn money for the family. She thought she could make money and send it home, thereby proving herself to her family and gaining their approval. In this she was following in the footsteps of the scholars in ancient China, who travelled thousands of miles from home in order to sit the imperial examination and then returned famous and successful.

Wan Rong went away to work in order to win her family’s approval, while another interviewee, Yan Pin, left in order to improve the situation of her family. She married her husband, who was in the kiln business, in 1985. They hired a few craftsmen and Yan Pin cooked for them. So Yan Pin and her husband were their bosses. But as her husband was a compulsive gambler, Yan Pin suggested that they close down the kiln business, and one of them should go and seek work in the city. In order to prove to her husband that she was up to it, she left home with her brother-in-law to find work in Shenzhen. Yan hoped that her departure could make her husband stop gambling and prove to him her own ability, thereby improving



the situation at home. The money she makes by working in Shenzhen is sent to her husband at home rather than spent by her. "Going away in order to make money and send it home" is an obvious motive.

When the migrant labourers made the decision to go away to work, they imagined that they were going to improve the living conditions of their family. The family is their main priority. Take Wan Rong, for example. Her dearest hope was to prove to her family that she was able to make money despite her small build, and that she had enough maturity to stay out of trouble and come home again. Even though she has quietly cried through homesickness, she has never thought of giving up, because she has not yet achieved her objective. In the course of adapting to her new surroundings, sustained by the hope of proving herself to her family she has gained a degree of strength unimagined by ordinary people. This strength has enabled her to overcome loneliness and homesickness and gradually to adapt to life far from home.

Take Yan Pin for another example. When she was newly arrived in Shenzhen, she deeply missed her daughter and husband. Initially she braced herself and denied her homesickness. But when a fellow worker sang the song, "Only mama is good in this world", this tough interviewee burst into tears. Nonetheless, she wanted to prove to her husband that she was capable of holding down a job far away from home. When it occurred to her that she could only earn a few hundred yuan in a few months in the home village, that she could earn a few hundred dollars a month in Shenzhen, Yan Pin found it easier to cope with the homesickness.

It can thus be seen that although they have left home, the family still remains in their mind. When the person is away from the home village, the heart is still attached to it. Both single and married interviewees always talked about their family in the interviews. As reflected in the words of the migrant labourers, the influence of the family is ever-present, from bachelorhood to married life, from the family they leave behind in the home

village to the new family they build in marriage. In their new existence they hope to create a moderately well-off family life for their children. Now based in the city, they have overcome the initial homesickness. So how do they see the future?

## Imagination, Future and the Family

I want to set up a poultry-feed factory at home. The cost is not great. At home, I have parents to provide for and I have a young child. So it is not easy to save up money. As regards career, I need to end up with some sort of achievement to my name. If I have a small business of my own and a couple of employees, then that will do for me. (Ya Bin)

Ya Bin, 35 years old, has a six-year-old son. He had worked in Haifeng and Liuchong, and fully understood that he was an outsider. He had even witnessed his fellow villagers being abused and beaten up by the locals. He is now a security guard at a knitwear factory. When asked about how he sees the future, he quickly summed up his ambition, then said "every parent in the world expects their child to become famous and find lifelong happiness".

Hong Ming, who has two daughters and who went to work in Shenzhen in 1994, told me how he imagined his future life:

If I work for two more years, I will be able to buy a house in the town (the centre of the home village) with a relative and run a small business. Then the living expenses of the family will be taken care of. I will be able to save at least 10,000 yuan a year. When my children get older, they'll go to junior secondary school. If their academic results are good, I will continue to support their schooling. If they pass the matriculation examination upon leaving high school, I will also finance their college studies, no matter how hard I have to work. (Hong Ming)

Ya Ming, who is 24 and single, confidently expressed his vision of the future:

Of course it is good! But to attain the good things in life, you have to work hard and you need an open mind. For example, when I take something on, we plan and ponder it slowly in our minds. I'm aiming for the top. It's nice up there (he looked contented). Only with improved technological skills can you plan your way to a perfect family after marriage.

### How about the women?

I want my whole family to live in peace. In future, the children will go to school, and a new house will be built for my mother-in-law to enjoy her old age. She's almost 80 years old. If my child is so smart as to get into university, I will support him financially. Then I shall wholly devote myself to my child and let my husband provide for me. (Wan Rong)

Wan Rong does not get along very well with her mother-in-law, who is comparatively narrow-minded. The latter often misunderstands her daughter-in-law, who likes to crack jokes, and she also shows favouritism for Wan Rong's brother-in-law. Still, Wan Rong has to fulfil the requirements of convention, play the role of a dutiful daughter-in-law and enable her mother-in-law to enjoy her old age. So she aspires to a future life of security and peace for her family.

Yue Rong's hope for the future life is similar to but also somewhat different from Wan Rong's:

I don't want to settle down here (Shenzhen). How can anyone stay here until old age, doing sweated labour? Forget it. I have no money now. Even if I have money, I will not buy a house in Shenzhen. In two years' time I will buy a house in the county town and find a job there, taking care of the two kids. I do not think so much about the future. I will simply remain at home and supervise the kids' studies. (Yue Fang)

Of course it'll be a bright future! A comfortable home, a comfortable life, and a nice husband. I yearn for the urban life, but not in Shenzhen, which is too far away from home. (Xiao Qin)

Xiao Qin, who is single and has worked in Shenzhen for more than half a year, expressed her aspirations for life. Aged only 22, she worked as a waitress in a restaurant in her home village after leaving her junior secondary school. Although her dream was to be a singer, family circumstances prevented her from achieving it. She could have stayed in her home village, but because of her longing for the outside world, she left. Having been given an introduction by her cousin, she went to a job in Shenzhen. Now settled in Shenzhen, which, with a dreamy look in her eyes, she described as "beautiful", she expressed her vision of the future.

From the interviewees' statements earlier, it is clear that, although they are already settled in the city, their vision of the future is still bound up with their family. In the imagination of these migrant labourers, be they married or single, with or without children, words like "parents", "whole family", and "children" repeatedly appear, reflecting the fact that the migrant labourers' hopes for the future are also their vision of their future family life. Their ideal future life is not an individual life but a perfect family life. What the singletons, like Xiao Qin and Ya Ming, think about is to start a perfect family with someone compatible and enjoy a happy life. What the married ones, such as Hong Ming and Wan Rong, think about is the life of their young, and it seems that their own individuality is not important. "I will finance their studies, no matter how hard I have to work" is most frequently heard from interviewees with children. It can thus be seen that the migrant labourers' vision of the future is concerned with their family and their children. They hope their children will have a good life. They are now working hard in order that their young ones will use their education to provide themselves with a better future.

As regards geography, almost all the interviewees expressed a desire to return to their home village at some point in the future. The city where they work, Shenzhen, is only their temporary home; they are just transients there:

After all, we belong to wherever we come from. Some fellow villagers have purchased houses outside, but they insist on being buried at home when they die. Even when we die, we shall die where we were born. At the end of the day, one's home village is best, for it is the place one knows best. (Wan Rong)

Wan Rong, who has already worked with her husband in Shenzhen for 10 years, divulged her feelings for her home village. These feelings are directly reflected in their descriptions of their future life. Their future destination is neither Shenzhen, which they initially imagined would bring them prosperity, nor another place better than Shenzhen, but their own home village. The Chinese attachment to their native soil is fully revealed here.

Migrant labourers' ideas vary according to time and place. As Ya Ming said, "People's dreams vary according to experience". Take Hong Ming for an example. Initially when he left his home village, what was in his mind was making money. But now that he is in Shenzhen, what is in his mind is the future of his children. Wan Rong also left her home village with a view to proving to her family that she could make money and make her own way in life. When she was still in her home village, she imagined that in Shenzhen she would taste the "benefits" mentioned by others. And the vanity of "returning home famous and successful" was in her mind. Now, having lived in Shenzhen for more than 10 years, it is her child's future that she is more concerned with.

### **Imagination, Transformation and the Family**

The individual's imagination changes according to the social environment and experience. Accordingly, when the interviewees were in their village and had no experience of working in any other place, their view of the destination city was defined by other people's experience. Their situation then was defined by the somewhat limited prospects offered by their home village. The decision to leave the village is an example of migrant labourers' transcending geographical limitations. Imagination is not limited by time but will change with time.

They have worked in Shenzhen for nearly 10 years. The years of working away from home have left them with many memories. Moreover, with the passage of time, most of them are no longer boys and girls. They have started their own families. Thus, their thinking has changed, social experience having enriched their response to the future. Their background includes not only their family of origin but also, now, their marital relationship and their offspring. These are the three main concerns of the migrant labourers. What the future symbolizes is not merely their personal future, but the hopes and prospects of the next generation.

Most of the interviewees left school without family commitments. Most of them have started

families of their own and given birth to children. Past experience tells them that if their educational standard is poor, their job prospects will not be good, even if they are able to leave their home village and earn more by working in the city. This experience, plus the burden of a family to provide for, influences their expectations of their own children. What they opted out of in the past—further or higher education—has now been transformed into their ambitions for the young. As long as their young can study more and go to college, it doesn't matter how hard they have to work:

When I first went away, I was a young girl making money for myself without the burden of family responsibilities. When I had money, I sent it to my parents. Now I have the burden of both parents and children. So I want to work in order to share my husband's responsibility. Husband and wife are supposed to share each other's burden. One should not be dependent on one's husband. (Wan Rong)

Wan Rong's description of herself at different stages applies to most of the other interviewees. She has been transformed from a young girl—someone's daughter—into a wife, a mother. Having demonstrated to her family that she was capable of an independent life she now shares family responsibilities with her husband. The main change in the process is the family, the dominant influence on the realization of the migrant labourers' dreams.

Before starting their own family, the interviewees have to shoulder a responsibility for the family of origin. After starting their own family, the interviewees still have to take care of the parental family—of both parties—as well as their own children. So in their hope for the future as constructed by the interviewees, the young become the focus of their dreams. They are motivated entirely by their family. The nature of their hopes may have changed, but the core concern—family—has never changed for migrant labourers.

### **Imagination, Gender and the Family**

Traditionally, we tend to think that women attach more importance to family than men, but the attitude to the family of this group of men and

women does not differ significantly in terms of gender. Although they miss their home, it is nevertheless home that provides the motivation to stay on, even though it may be very far away:

When I first came, I was very homesick. When I went away, my child hadn't learned to walk. During the day, I worked and cracked jokes with fellow villagers, but at night I missed my home. Those days were not easy at all. I missed my wife and child. And communication was not easy in those days. There was no telephone and I could only write letters. (Hong Ming)

Hong Ming thus relied on one family letter every fortnight to dispel his homesickness. Even though he is a male, he readily admits how much he missed his family:

At that time, I missed home very much and felt lonely. I wanted to talk to my family, but there was no telephone in those days. We could only communicate by letters. I often went to the post office to pick up mail. Once, there was no letter for me and I just could not help crying in the post office doorway. But it was no one's fault but mine; I had taken the decision to leave. So I could only hold on. At that time, I just told my sister about this in a letter. (Wan Rong)

Wan Rong also suffered from homesickness. Both she and Hong Ming relied on letters to dispel their homesickness. It can thus be seen that family is very important to both men and women. The homesickness has gradually been overcome through communication with the family.

The emotional experiences of the men and the women are similar. But on a deeper level, the way they imagine the future may vary. In particular when they talk about how they see the future, gender differences can be seen. Take for example the single interviewees, Ya Ming and Xiao Qin. They described their respective views of the future as follows:

After I have learnt everything there is to know about the garment trade, it will be easy to find something to do. I can please myself and do whatever I like. (Ya Ming)

Of course I'm working for the future! Of course it will be a great future, with a comfortable home and a comfortable life. (Xiao Qin)

The most important component of Xiao Qin's ideal future is a comfortable home, a beautiful prospect she is now working hard for.

Then let us compare the two married interviewees, Wan Rong and De Wen. The ideal future of Wan Rong is:

May my whole family remain in harmony. If my children are smart enough to get into college, I will support them. And then a new house will be built for my mother-in-law. She's almost seventy. And she will spend her old age there. (Wan Rong)

There are short-term and long-term targets to my plan. The former is to accumulate enough capital for me to compete and develop. There are too many dreams in life. The latter target is yet to be planned. (De Wen)

On the surface, to judge from the two contrasting responses earlier, women's priority is the family. Both Xiao Qin's and Wan Rong's imagined futures are centred on the family. In contrast, the two men's, De Wen's and Ya Ming's, ambitions highlight their own careers, and family does not seem to be their main concern. However, after the two male interviewees had finished talking about their career aspirations, they went on to say that their career development was for the purpose of "providing for their parents", "the kids", "constructing a perfect family", etc.

It can thus be seen that the core concern of both the men and the women is the family. They cannot construct their hopes independently of the family framework; they just express themselves in different terms. Culturally, men are expected to lay emphasis on their career and women to lay emphasis on the family. Whether the emphasis is on career or family, the starting or ending point is the family. Men use their career as a way to pay back their family and provide for their wife. Women are traditionally expected to serve their husband and raise their children at home, but the female migrant labourers I interviewed work for their family, providing for their family together with their husband.

The dreams of the migrant labourers are all very nice. But is their reality so perfect? The conflict in real experience is evident in their own words. The purpose in leaving is to bring the family a much higher income than is achievable by staying home, but it makes it impossible for the family members to live together. They can only come together once a year or even once

every couple of years. When they go home with money earned, it is called “returning home famous and successful”. But they live in faraway places without social security. Their income is less than that of the city residents, and they are seen as a group in need of social security.

They have chosen to leave their home village but they miss it. The departure from the home village estranges them from their kin. Their responsibility for the family, including their responsibility for the parents and children, is fulfilled in the form of money sent home instead of personal care. Although the family’s standard of living is improved, the three generations are cut off geographically and they miss out on each other’s joys and sorrows. The money earned by hard toil is mostly spent on the Chinese New Year trip home. If they choose not to go home for the Chinese New Year, they will have to forego the family reunion, a further cause of emotional pain. Although they make more money, they also spend more money. When their salary is raised, they want more. This seems to have become a kind of cycle. And the migrant labourers live in this cycle, in which gain and loss, sadness and satisfaction alternate.

In a sense, the pursuit of their dreams leads the interviewees to live outside time and space as a social experience. The interviewees are all capable of independent thought. Their imagination is centred on the individual and the family. This group of people share a similar past. They have all left their home village and gathered in the same factory, worked in the same city, and formed a group, freely telling each other of their hopes and dreams. These hopes and dreams are not only personally but also collectively held by the migrant labourers as a social group. Their hopes, dreams, conflicts, and longings all stem from their respective families.

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## Conclusion

From the analysis earlier it is found that the migrant labourers cross the divide between the countryside and the city through leaving home. At a certain point in time, based on their own social position and personal experiences, they

make a decision about their future, leave their home village and move into a completely alien environment. This move makes the migrant labourers not only cross the network of kinship but also become part of a macroscopic social stratum. They are no longer native villagers but a mobile population in the city, a new social class of migrant labourers. The migrant labourers therefore enter the city, receive a higher income, and enrich their own horizons, so that their world is no longer confined to their home village.

Meanwhile, this migration also causes the labourers to leave the bosom of the family and initiate a more remote relationship which may be characterized by the metaphor, “kite and string”. Care for the family is expressed through the remittance of money. Intergenerational communication and association no longer take place under the same roof, but are achieved through phone calls, written correspondence and, hopefully, annual reunions. The grandparents, instead of the parents, raise and care for the children. The distance between the three generations is extended as a result of the emigration. But this is for the sake of the family. Hence, the sacrifice of family feelings is considered worthwhile. Only when the migrant labourers say this to themselves can they continue to work at a job they consider hard.

This decision makes them enter a diversified and urban society, fulfil their wish to leave their village and make their own way in a multi-faceted world, experiencing homesickness and the pain of being unable to go home. Although the decision to leave results in a lot of changes for the migrant labourers, they nurture an idealized image of the family while working in the big city. This dream changes with the passage of time and changes of place. This cannot but make me think of the concept of family which is so important to Chinese society. In the twenty-first century, although social modernization has resulted in a lot of changes for the family, it has not shaken the most basic social structure of Chinese society—the family.

The famous Torrents Trilogy, *Family* (1931), *Spring* (1938), and *Autumn* (1940), of the Chinese writer, Ba Jin, depicts Chinese society sandwiched between new and old ways, in which the family oppresses the individual. It is a situation in which the family constrains the individual, who



tries his or her best to run away from it. However, the imagination of the migrant labourers is different from that of Ba Jin's heroes and heroines. Although the migrant labourers, who come from different families, have left their homes, it is not in order to break free of the family's "clutches", but to repay the family in a better way. When they are single, they want to fulfil their desire to know the kaleidoscopic world and show their family the image of a stoic daughter or son. When they are married and have their own family, they hope that their young ones can receive a better education and have a happy family. The dreams and aspirations of the migrant labourers are very different from those of the heroes and heroines of Ba Jin, who strive to break free of the familial yoke.

From this it can be seen that in our society, which is full of new ideas and undergoing rapid urbanization, the study of migrant labourers cannot be separated from the family. Most of the contemporary studies on Chinese migrant labourers, such as those carried out by such academics as Li Qiang (2004), Yu Hong and Ding Pinpin (2004), San Lianxiang (2004), and Zhou Daming (2005) place the migrant labourers in their own social stratum in the city and expose the injustices encountered by them. The scholars look at the social group of the migrant labourers from a macroscopic perspective, lay particular stress on reflecting social problems and seldom mention what the migrant labourers themselves think.

Looking at the subject from a sociological standpoint, this chapter focuses on two major, time-honoured elements of Chinese society—family and migration—and studies the yearnings of the migrant labourers as a social group. This study attempts to make use of imagination and understand the aspirations of the migrant labourers, who have been labelled as marginal figures.

Chinese society attaches importance to the past of the family. The family is regarded as taking precedence over the individual and as more important than the individual. For the sake of the family's survival, interest, and glory, the individual may be ignored and sacrificed. The self is not an independent self but a familial self. Many

Chinese sayings, such as "all men within the four seas are brothers", "paternal king", "son-official", "family business", "domestic fowl", and "domestic animal", extending from political power structure through animals to the four seas, constantly refer to "family" (Yue Qingpin 1989).

In both Chinese culture and the daily life of China, the importance of family cannot be overlooked. Family is an entity in a culture that calls for sacrifice, as well as a prison constraining the individual. The individual has to play different roles in the family as defined by culture. However, the group of migrant labourers in this chapter do not passively internalize family like individuals in traditional society. Instead they actively construct their hopes for the family and envision the future based on the family. Curious about the multi-faceted world, they make the decision to "leave the home village for new horizons", with a view to proving themselves to their family as a daughter or son who can increase their income. When they have their own family, they hope to provide their children with a good material life and so they stay in the city to work.

Population mobility and migration have already left their traces in Chinese history. The Chinese migrated to, and gathered in, the Central Plains in the ancient times of the Xia Dynasty (ca. twenty-first to ca. seventeenth century B.C.), the Shang Dynasty (ca. sixteenth to eleventh B.C.), and the Zhou Dynasty (ca. Eleventh century to 256 B.C.). There were also population migrations during various dynasties such as the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 220) and the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.). In modern times, Chinese were transported to foreign countries where they were exploited as virtual slave labour. The civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists gave rise to further migrations by hordes of displaced persons. Now the mobility of migrant labourers inside China is a kind of continuation of that historical tradition. Most population migrations in the old days were connected with political circumstances. The unit of migration was not only the individual but also the family or region. Even those individuals who went overseas and worked in slave-labour conditions did so for the sake of the family. Today's migrants transcend the constraints

of distance and are driven by their dreams of the future of the family. The decision to leave is their response to the challenge of distance. The entire process seems to be the individual's decision at a certain time and in a certain place. But behind the individual is the shadow of the family; what the individual yearns for is to see the family's hopes for the future realized.

This study has enabled me to learn and discover new things about sociological research. Sociology is an interdisciplinary study. Disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, and history have been clearly divided from one another. But sociological research can incorporate the strengths of various disciplines and reconstruct a picture illuminated by the spotlight of sociology, presenting a new view to people. Sociological research not only focuses on a specific point in time, studies and analyses sociological phenomena, but also transcends time. It separates the present from the past and looks forward to the future. Although sociology can cross disciplines, its uniqueness is not thereby diluted.

Another finding is that sociological research, language, and culture are inseparable. I mainly conversed with the migrant labourers in Putonghua. Had I talked in Cantonese, our communication would have been hindered significantly. In order to associate with them, I also had to know something about different parts of the Chinese mainland, such as the customs of different provinces, different eating habits, and regional policies and current affairs. My fluency in their language and my ability to identify with them culturally narrowed the distance between us, so that I could quickly find common ground within the limited time available. What is important about associating with the interview subjects is the mutual trust that is built up and the fact that one becomes accepted as a member of the group.

The research subjects were introduced to me by my relatives. And the interview was conducted at the first meeting with each subject. If I had worked in the factory for a period of time and lived with the research subjects before I interviewed them, then I would have obtained an even deeper understanding of this group of migrant labourers. Even greater mutual trust would have

developed. I could have put myself in their shoes and come up with richer and deeper insights.

This chapter makes use of face-to-face in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted at the workplace of the migrant labourers. The material of the interviews mainly depended on my interaction with the interviewees. Group discussion would have enabled the interview subjects to share their own stories with each other, and this would have produced more data than was possible in the individual interview. When individuals with similar backgrounds and experiences gather together, collective sharing of information can bring out the characteristics of the subjects of the research even more. As this chapter focuses on the group nature of the migrant labourers, not much gender comparison is made. The interviewees mostly come from Sichuan. If migrant labourers from different provinces had been compared, this study could have been extended.

This study has equipped me with a deeper understanding of Chinese peasantry. The state will develop the rural areas, providing free education and infrastructure. The most recent migrant-labour policy of the state is no doubt targeted at the security of jobs in the city. Government measures for solving the problem of the migrant labourers are aimed at the city, while the word, "family", is not mentioned at all. My finding is that family should be the key to any attempt to solve the problem of the peasants. The so-called "push-and-pull factors", "the problem of Chinese social classes", and "the *hukou* issue" do not directly engage with the dream constructed for the family on the strength of the peasants' departure for the big city.

In order to solve the migrant-labour problem and even the "agriculture, rural area and peasant" problem, the state has to listen to the peasants, help them to realize their dreams, and meet the needs of peasant families, because they are most concerned with their family and it is the family that defines the choices they make. What the migrant labourers care about is job security and the education and future of their young. The relevant government departments may relax controls and encourage local and outside bodies to set up "help centres for migrant labourers' families".

At the same time, they can allocate funds and invite scholars to study issues related to the Chinese family and prepare the way for future policies in respect of these.

In future China will have to confront the dark side of the family, as reflected in family conflict, such as tensions between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the generation gap, and family problems caused by the absence of migrant-worker parents and the separation of parents from children.

No doubt, the Chinese culture of the individual altruistically placing a premium on the family, constructing his or her aspirations for the family, and seeking happiness for the family, is deeply rooted. On the surface, this is “selfless” behaviour, but what deserves consideration is the problems brought about by this kind of selflessness. The ideology of upholding the family above all is, nonetheless, a kind of “selfishness”.

This selfishness causes the whole society to prioritize family. Over-emphasis on the role of family in the process of socialization may even overshadow the interests of society as a whole. Family is not negligible because there is inevitably conflict between its selflessness and selfishness as well as between family members. As a result, the family can be neither over- nor under-emphasized.

The joys and sorrows of migrant labourers are connected with their desires and aspirations. The migrant labourers’ joy is to be able to provide for their family and make sure that their young grow up healthy. The migrant labourers’ sorrow is their separation from their family. The government has to attach importance to the joy and sorrow of the migrant labourers. It is hoped that the authorities will help the migrant labourers to fulfil their hopes—creating stable families in which the young enjoy happiness.

## Appendix: Personal background of interviewees

Alias	Home village	Marital status	Number of children	Number of years spent working away from home	Job
Wan Rong	Sichuan	Married	One son	16	Seamstress
Xiao Yin	Sichuan	Married	One son and one daughter	10	Garment checker
Dai Yan	Sichuan	Married	Two daughters	9	Measurement technician
Yan Pin	Sichuan	Married	One daughter	13	Garment checker
Xiao Qin	Sichuan	Single	–	1	Measurement worker
Yu Lian	Hubei	Married	One son and one daughter	10	Seamstress
Ri Di	Guangdong	Married	Pregnant	7	Female measurement worker
Yue Fang	Shanxi	Married	One son and one daughter	10	Female measurement worker
Ya Ming	Sichuan	Single	–	7	Garment sample maker
Hong Ming	Sichuan	Married	Two daughters	11	Garment ironer
Ya Bin	Sichuan	Married	One son	8	Security guard
De Wen	Hunan	Married	One son	12	Security guard

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# The Prejudicial Portrayal of Immigrant Families from Mainland China in Hong Kong Media

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Peggy Kung Cheuk-lam

Since the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government emphatically warned citizens in 1998 that 1.67 million qualified mainlanders would “pour” into Hong Kong and cost the government and taxpayers 710 billion Hong Kong dollars, new immigrant families quickly became a subject of heated debate in Hong Kong. After several years, Hong Kong people have gradually accepted or become accustomed to the fact of new immigrant families migrating to Hong Kong. In early 2011, the SAR government announced a new policy which allows the over-aged (i.e., exceeding 14 years old by the time of application) children who live in the mainland to reunite with their Hong Kong parents by applying for a one-way permit (i.e., with residential and working rights) to come to Hong Kong. Such a new policy created interested discussion in Hong Kong society but the public voice was relatively weak when compared with that in 1998. However, it does not mean the local Hongkongers have finally accepted and welcomed the mainland migrants; indeed the local Hongkongers’ resistance and suspicion have not decreased. In recent years, a number of disturbing immigrant family tragedies have occurred, a phenomenon which soon attracted attention, reports, and comments from different mass media. Quite a few scholars take the problem of new immigrant families as their research subject, but

they rarely suggest that media reports might be biased. The objective of this chapter is to fill this gap in our knowledge and explore in depth the orientation of local newspapers in describing new immigrant families.

Who are these new immigrants from the mainland? They are Chinese who have left their home village/place of birth to come and settle in Hong Kong. They are of the same race and ancestral origin as Hongkongers. The difference lies in the place where they were born and grew up, and hence the place of their education and culture. The so-called immigrant families are those family units with one or more members who have come from mainland China and settled in Hong Kong for less than seven years. They can be father, mother, and/or children, the proportion of mothers being greater than that of fathers. This is because Hong Kong men who marry mainland Chinese outnumber Hong Kong women who marry mainland Chinese. And the younger generation will follow their mothers to settle in Hong Kong.

Generally speaking, the social status of new mainland immigrants in Hong Kong is rather low, and they are even labeled as “parasites on society” and “antisocial pests.” In time, the phrase, “new immigrant”, has become a negative label. Following labeling theory, deviant behavior in society is often a result of the community’s reaction to, and labeling of, certain groups. The labeled in time then regard the label as their master status, which replaces or displaces all their other identities, and eventually gives rise to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker 1963).

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That is to say, when the immigrant family is labeled as social parasites, they accept and internalize other people's view of them and give up their other identities, such as a father who provides for his wife and children, a diligent worker, etc., thereby confirming popular prejudice against them. It is an interactive process.

Stereotypes and stigmatization are powerful social forces. If new immigrants are denigrated, people will feel justified in adopting negative attitudes and prejudices towards them, and will reject them. No guilt will be felt. Instead, people will think that the new immigrants deserve harsh treatment. In Hong Kong, the prejudice suffered by new immigrants is quite serious. They are subject to different degrees of rejection in terms of social status, employment, social intercourse, etc. This chapter attempts to ascertain whether the print media are biased in their reports. The power of the mass media is in part constructive, in part destructive. Print media not only reflect the public's views and social "reality" but also perform the function of guiding and "educating" the public. The mass media influence the public's perception of events and matters, while the public also influence the orientation of reportage in the media. In this way, the mass media and the public influence each other and "reconstruct" social values and standards together. This chapter seeks to explore the "dialogue of collusion" between the media and their readers.

Some sociologists have been taking an interest in media prejudice against new immigrants from the mainland. They think that the mass media shape the underdeveloped and uncivilized image of new immigrants from China through repeated negative reporting. Their Hong Kong-centered outlook mobilizes society's negative emotions against new immigrants (Wang 2006). Scholars think that the media often exaggerate negative news about new immigrants, or they indulge in sensation mongering—for example, how new immigrants compete with local workers for jobs, worsening the problem of unemployment (Law and Lee 2006). The Home Affairs Branch of the Government (1997) also reveals that the media often portray new immigrants as impoverished, lazy, uneducated, and poorly skilled.

The prejudice of the media against immigrants is actually not a unique phenomenon, confined to a single place and time. Chan (2005) studied media attitudes in Timmins, Canada, in reporting on Chinese immigrants around the time of the Second World War. According to his findings, the attitude of the media was to regard Chinese immigrants as transients or economic traitors. They presented the Chinese as being interested only in earning Canadian money to take back to China. In addition, the Chinese, as portrayed by the media, were an uncivilized and barbarous group who lacked any moral standards. These attitudes have their historical causes. The Canadian government's immigration policy at that time discriminated against Chinese immigrants and imposed countless ordinances on them. The media reflected this prejudice, which thus reinforced the Canadians' hostility towards Chinese immigrants. From this research it can be seen that under the influence of official attitudes, the media become biased against alien groups. Society and the media influence and dialogue with each other, thereby constructing a social reality of their own.

This chapter analyzes all the reports about immigrant families from the Chinese mainland in all Hong Kong Chinese newspapers from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2006. These newspapers have differing political loyalties: some are known for being objective and balanced; some are principally interested in exaggeration and sensation. I compared the reports of all the newspapers, and the social image of new immigrant families as constructed by the media will emerge. These reports mainly appear in the news, current affairs, comment columns, and the supplements of the Hong Kong press. There are more than 200 of these reports, three-quarters of which are neutral, i.e., their treatment of the issue does not involve the author's own point of view or attitude. Fifty-eight of them involve the reporter's attitude and point of view, and they are also the focal point of this chapter. What is noteworthy is that, in the course of only two years, more than 200 reports appeared in relation to one particular social group (i.e., one report at least every four days), which to a certain extent reflects society's

concern with the group. And those 58 partial reports all appeared in the newspapers mentioned earlier. Therefore the analysis below covers the collective thinking of the local newspaper media, instead of just concentrating on the standpoint of a certain category of newspapers.

This chapter studies the contents, language, approach, and orientation of the reportage. Among the 58 partial reports, 49 (about 85%) have a negative bias; only three (about 5%) a positive one. The remaining six (about 10%) combine both positive and negative points of view. The so-called positive reports include those which seek to arouse public awareness of the problems of new immigrants, oppose prejudice, and present new immigrant families in a favorable light. Negative reports include those which define new immigrant families as a problem group, express hostility to them, and deny their social value. Those reports combining positive and negative attitudes include praise of or sympathy for new immigrants as well as derogatory opinions. As judged from the figures, negative attitudes dominate Hong Kong media reports about new immigrant families, while positive reports are rare. This observation alone is sufficient to highlight the unfairness of the media.

Although reports with a neutral stance amount to three-quarters of the total, this study discovers that in reporting news about new immigrants, the papers always tend to be negative when they deem it necessary to add their own opinions. However, a negative orientation does not mean that the media are purely hostile or resistant to new immigrants. This study finds that the feelings of the print media/the public in relation to new immigrants are complicated and diverse, in other words, ambivalent.

Sociologists like Berger and Luckmann maintain that there are no objective facts in society. In fact, all “realities” are constructed by social institutions. When the mainstream attitudes in society give impetus to each other and confirm the existence of a certain “reality,” its social characteristics, thoughts, and behavior are stereotyped and internalized, creating a so-called reality, in other words, a socially constructed reality (Berger and Luckmann 1971). This chapter analyzes whether the reports have a

certain bias in describing new immigrant families, how this bias is expressed in the media, and how it eventually slips into collusion with the readers, constructing the “reality” of new immigrant families collectively.

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## Social Images of New Immigrant Families in the Newspapers

Although more and more new immigrant families from mainland China come to settle in Hong Kong, Hongkongers are not familiar with new immigrant families, neither do they have the opportunity to be in contact with new immigrant families. Thus the public’s knowledge of new immigrants mostly comes from the media, and the image of the new immigrant as constructed by Hong Kong citizens can be seen as the image projected by the media.

## Economic Problems

This study finds that among the news reports, there are actually as many as 22 which portray new immigrant families as an impoverished social group. Amounting to about 40% of overall reports, these items involve either direct description, indirect allusion, or occasional mention. Quite a few reports even highlight the comprehensive social security assistance (CSSA) status of new immigrant families, labeling them as an economic burden on society. For example, it is reported in *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, “One of the causes of the worsening poverty of Hong Kong is the policy of allowing 150 mainlanders to come and settle in Hong Kong every day, which presents Hong Kong society and government with a heavy burden. Therefore, in order to be effective in helping the poor, Hong Kong should deal with the issue of new immigrants coming to Hong Kong and adjust the one-way permit policy as soon as possible.”<sup>1</sup> Another instance is reported

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<sup>1</sup> *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, 21 Feb. 2005, “Suggestion that One-way Policy be Readjusted as soon as possible,” A05 Hong Kong Commercial Daily Forum.

in *Metro Hong Kong*, “Whilst the Government is vigorously developing the Hong Kong economy, quite a few new immigrants have held back the Hong Kong economy.... Pressed by the need of income, quite a few new immigrant families apply to the Government for CSSA. How much CSSA has the Hong Kong Government to pay on an annual basis to those immigrant families with the ability to work?”<sup>2</sup> A few years ago, Hong Kong underwent a financial crisis and deflation. On top of these, there is the financial deficit which has bedeviled Hong Kong for years. As a result, these reports will surely make the readers think that new immigrant families are all poor people dependent on the social welfare system of Hong Kong and causing problems for the economy.

Furthermore, mere “reliance” on Hong Kong social welfare is not so offensive to Hong Kong people as “exploitation.” In quoting Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, York Chow Yat-ngok, *Singtao Daily* points out that the children of new immigrant families are used by their parents as a means for the family to acquire CSSA. Many new immigrant families-of-four claim CSSA for three persons (The newspaper reported it is normal claiming practice that as one of the family members may be the only breadwinner in the family, the earning is not enough to cover all the expenses of the family; so they apply for CSSA for 3 persons) and then transfer part of the allowance to their kin in their home villages.<sup>3</sup> This kind of report may make citizens blame the new immigrants for Hong Kong’s economic problems. They think that, apart from not working, they greedily feed themselves on CSSA, from which they also subsidize their relatives and friends on the mainland. Consequently, Hong Kong taxpayers’ hostility to new immigrant families from mainland China is intensified. And these new immigrant families have become scapegoats, onto whom Hong Kong people project their discontents. They blame them as the crux of the problem, but disregard other

factors contributing to the economic problem, thereby engendering social conflict.

However, are these facts? According to *Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics* published in July 2005, up till the end of 2004, the total number of CSSA cases is 295,694, and cases of new immigrants receiving assistance amount to only 41,571, i.e., 14% of the total. So much for the “heavy burden to Hong Kong society and government” or “reasons for the aggravation of Hong Kong poverty,” as put by the newspapers in general. Nonetheless, the rising tendency of new immigrants to claim CSSA really deserves concern. The overall rise in CSSA cases from 1999 to 2004 is only 28.2%, but the rise in CSSA cases among new immigrants during the same period is 79.6%. No wonder, they become a common target for the media. Moreover, in 2005–2006, around 200,000 people were in the queue for public housing, one-third of whom were new arrivals from mainland China. The new immigrants’ share of the public housing population is around 6% (Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Government 2007). From this it can be seen that although the proportion now is still very low, future demand is going to be heavy.

Of course, the above-mentioned data cannot completely reflect the economic condition of new immigrants and their demand for welfare. As judged from the above information only, the economic problem of new immigrant families certainly deserves concern, but is not serious. However, the media seldom mention how the new immigrants endeavor to break away from poverty; they simply label them as destitute families and CSSA families, apparently stereotyping them as parasites on society.

There are two reasons for the media to be selective in their reports. First, the mass media are not scholars. They do not have to understand the entire social reality or do in-depth studies. They only report topics and events of news value. Second, positive news about new immigrants is not of interest to the readers. In the final analysis, the media are commercial enterprises, which have to cater for the tastes of their readers.

<sup>2</sup> *Metro Hong Kong*, 8 March 2006, “Problems Still have to be Faced,” P46 Supplement.

<sup>3</sup> *Singtao Daily*, 14 Feb. 2005, “Concern with New Immigrant CSSA Children,” A03 Highlights.

## Marital Problems

Marriages between new immigrants and natives of Hong Kong are often characterized by the local media as “old husband and young wife” matches. An older man from Hong Kong, with few prospects of finding a suitable match at home, marries a woman from mainland China. In most cases this is a young woman in her 20s or early 30s. After she is granted permission to come to Hong Kong, the couple fall out over money, which then gives rise to domestic violence. For example, according to the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*: “The average age difference between the husband and wife of a new immigrant family is 20 years.... What should have been a happy reunion of the family is often the beginning of a tragedy.”<sup>4</sup> Although the “old husband and young wife” phenomenon is common among new immigrant families, the report, in implying that this is the beginning of a tragedy, seems to be indulging in alarmist talk. Another instance: according to *The Sun*: “These China–Hong Kong marriages are not perfect matches. The matchmaker is the Hong Kong identity card and the compensation is the CSSA.”<sup>5</sup> From the above text, it can be seen that the reporter’s attitude towards China–Hong Kong marriages is relatively negative, foreseeing tragic consequences, denying the possibility of stability and emotional compatibility in this type of marriage, and stereotyping them as problem marriages or marriages motivated by the prospect of material gain.

What is worse is that the reporters associate the problem of China–Hong Kong marriages with the general ethos of Hong Kong society, and describe it as something affecting the core values of Hong Kong society. For example, *Singtao Daily* informs us: Now among the cases taken over by the 61 integrated family-service centers under the Social Welfare Department, the proportion of new immigrants seeking help exceeds

70%. Paul Tang Kwok-wai, Director of the Social Welfare Department, thinks that before marrying a mainland woman, many Hongkongers may not have clearly and carefully considered all the implications of their decision. Consequently, after the mainland wife succeeds in her application to come to Hong Kong for the purposes of bringing the family back together, family problems occur one after the other. China–Hong Kong marriages have already been a problem in Hong Kong for years.<sup>6</sup>

This kind of negative reportage often identifies China–Hong Kong marriages as the cause of a range of social problems. For example, according to *Wenweipao*: “The main cause of many family tragedies is *mercenary* marriage between an older man and a much younger woman. The female immigrants are not familiar with Hong Kong. In most cases, their children have been permitted to come to Hong Kong first. As the children lived separately from their father or mother when they were young, they have had limited contact with their parents and the relationship has suffered. These factors have made the problem of new immigrants a complicated, one combining family problems with juvenile problems, etc.”<sup>7</sup> The article describes China–Hong Kong marriages as *mercenary* marriages which often run into trouble. To some extent, this also makes the readers prejudiced against China–Hong Kong marriages.

## Domestic Violence

China–Hong Kong marriages and money problems leading to domestic violence and family tragedies are also another focal point of mass media. Since the sensational Tin Shui Wai family

<sup>4</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 June 2006, “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Wife,” P11 Critiques on Current Affairs.

<sup>5</sup>*The Sun*, 9 June 2006, “Taking a Radical Measure is better than Fire Fighting,” A44 Editorial and Columns.

<sup>6</sup>*Singtao Daily*, 2 Aug. 2006, “Tang Kwok-wai: New Immigrants and the Third Party as the Main Causes; The Social Welfare Reconstructs Family Concept and Reduces Violence,” A08 Hong Kong News.

<sup>7</sup>*Wenweipo*, 18 Jan. 2005, “Special Topic: Chow Wing Sun: Family Tragedy Comes from *Mercenary* Marriage,” A21 Focus on Hong Kong.

massacre in April 2004,<sup>8</sup> the newspapers in general have held a negative attitude towards new immigrant families, and even describe new immigrant families as the “time bomb of society.” For example, a *Hong Kong Economic Journal* report reads: “Marriages between the two regions have always given rise to a number of problems, which, if not properly dealt with, will lead to family tragedies. Since the 1980s, 10–20,000 Hong Kong–mainland marriages have been registered every year. And the cumulative total is 200,000. Now the problems are gradually emerging, and more shocking family violence may occur at any moment.”<sup>9</sup> The chapter almost equates China–Hong Kong marriage to family tragedy. It not only “threatens” Hong Kong people with figures but also adopts an alarmist tone in the last sentence. In order to arouse the readers’ attention, the reports describe “their issues” as “our issues,” and the newspapers extend the influence of the family and marriage problems of new immigrants to the entire Hong Kong society. For example, a *Hong Kong Daily News* reports reads: “Many working-class families are in hardship. And quite a few new immigrant families have family problems. As a result, the heartless culture of society has increased and quite a few people vent their frustrations on social workers.”<sup>10</sup> This kind of report not only highlights the family problems of new immigrants, but also makes the point that they damage the ethos of society and get law-abiding people into trouble, thereby provoking Hong Kong citizens’ hostility to them. In fact, family problems occur in every community or group. There is no evidence to show that domestic violence is a phenomenon unique to the new

immigrants, let alone to show that they bring trouble upon law-abiding citizens.

Then what are the family tragedies described by the media? These are mainly cases of violence, including wife abuse and child abuse in new immigrant families. For example, *Hong Kong Daily News*<sup>11</sup> and *The Sun*<sup>12</sup> identify new immigrant families claiming CSSA as the primary cause of the sharp rise in spouse abuse and child abuse cases in Hong Kong and as a high-risk group for domestic violence. The trigger is rows over money, i.e., what *Singpao*<sup>13</sup> and *Hong Kong Economic Times*<sup>14</sup> call “an impoverished couple getting into all kinds of trouble.” Some family tragedies involve the son killing the mother. For instance, according to *Hong Kong Economic Journal*: In the case of a young boy who attacked and injured his mother with a cleaver, it is obviously a new immigrant family.... New immigrant families display alternate extremes: Either the parents are over-protective of their children or they are incapable of giving their children any kind of guidance. Neither do they know how to do so. Often, having given birth to the child, they think they have already done their duty.<sup>15</sup> In this way, new immigrant families are wired for violence. They are described as having neither the ability nor the will to solve their problems, thus increasing the risks of child abuse and spouse abuse. They are fertile ground for family tragedies.

<sup>8</sup>The deceased, Jin Suxiong, in the case was a new immigrant wife, who had come to Hong Kong for less than four months. She and her two twin daughters were murdered by her Hong Kong husband, Li Boshen, who eventually committed suicide. This is the Tin Shui Wai family massacre case, which shocked Hong Kong for some time.

<sup>9</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 June 2006, “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Wife,” P11 Critiques on Current Affairs.

<sup>10</sup>*Hong Kong Daily News*, 4 Sept. 2006, “Social Workers often Attacked; Police Urged to Support,” A03 Highlights.

<sup>11</sup>*Hong Kong Daily News*, 5 July 2005, “Number of Spouse Abuse and Child Abuse Cases Rapidly Rising; Figures from HKU Studies 100 Times that from Social Welfare Department,” A04 Hong Kong News.

<sup>12</sup>*The Sun*, 5 July 2005, “One Abuse Case every four Families: Child Abuse and Spouse Abuse Increasing; Scholars Advocate Counseling for Abusers,” A11 Local News.

<sup>13</sup>*Singpao*, 11 Sept. 2005, “It is Difficult to Teach the Children, And Even more Difficult to Keep the Family Intact,” B08 Sunday Magazine.

<sup>14</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 1 Dec. 2005, “Marginal World of Hong Kong,” C15 Mood.

<sup>15</sup>“*Hong Kong Economic Journal*” 24 May 2006. “It is Difficult to Teach the Children, And Even more Difficult to Keep the Family Intact,” P23 Critiques on Current Affairs.



## Social Images of New Immigrant Women in the Newspapers

The typical China–Hong Kong new immigrant family is a Hong Kong husband plus a new immigrant wife from Mainland China, with one or more children. The new immigrant wife and her children will apply to settle in Hong Kong on the grounds that the family wishes to come back together. New immigrant wives are a frequent target of the papers and their image is poor. On the one hand, they are generally described as gold diggers. In order to lead a comfortable life and raise their status, they have married an older man. Their resentment upon arriving in Hong Kong and discovering that the reality does not match their expectations is the primary cause of marital crisis. On the other hand, in reporting family violence, the newspapers tend to sympathize with the abused immigrant wives and to be concerned with domestic violence. Nonetheless, when greed is linked to abuse, will the readers not be led to think that they “deserve” it?

First of all, the newspapers will describe those new immigrant wives as vain women who have married Hong Kong men simply to improve their quality of life, suggesting that there is no love whatsoever between them. For example, *Singpao* says, “This type of cross-border bride married Hong Kong men mainly to get out of poverty. It was not until they came to Hong Kong that they found a considerable discrepancy between their expectations and the reality, which led to conflict. This sometimes took extreme forms.”<sup>16</sup> “Quite a few (new immigrant) wives did not discover, until they arrived in Hong Kong, that their husbands were working-class men, who were unlikely to provide them with a comfortable life.... And problems such as divorce, adultery, and domestic violence ensued.”<sup>17</sup> *Takungpao* says, “Cross-border brides imagine Hong Kong to be heaven on earth,

but upon arrival discover their husbands to be low-income earners or even dependent on CSSA. When the dream is broken, the marital relationship breaks up.”<sup>18</sup> *Economic Journal* describes new immigrant wives as heartless, “Mainland women marry Hong Kong men in order to improve their economic situation. But when they come to Hong Kong, their standard of living suffers a disastrous decline and their status is suddenly downgraded to ‘mainland bitch’. Their first reaction is to reject their penniless and frustrated husbands.”<sup>19</sup>

The reports above seem to put the blame for family problems and even domestic violence on new immigrant women, considering that the problems are caused by the women’s insatiable greed, rather than the abusers. The quotations earlier do not condone domestic violence or abuse, but when new immigrant women are stereotyped as vain and greedy persons, it seems to rationalize the behavior of the abusers and attribute the root of the problem to those women.

The phenomenon of putting the blame on the victim is called “blaming the victim” (Ryan 1971). Precisely because the mass media in general do not approve of new immigrant women, they tend to demonize them, so that they look for pretexts to reject and discriminate against them.

Even when new immigrant women are the victimized group in domestic violence, people do not believe that it is the fault of the abusers. They think that it is the victims’ responsibility. In this way, the mass media play up new immigrant women as the ones who provoke domestic violence, so that mistreatment of them is thought reasonable. When the mass media put the blame for family violence on women, it is proof that gender discrimination is deeply embedded in Hong Kong society.

Of course, not all reports blame the new immigrant women. Towards the difficulties and violence encountered by them after coming to Hong Kong, some reports do adopt a sympathetic and solicitous attitude. For example, *Oriental Daily*

<sup>16</sup>*Singpao*, 11 Sept. 2005, “Troubled by Problems of Unemployment and Marriage; Tin Shui Wai Family Violence Crisis Difficult to Resolve,” B08 Sunday Magazine.

<sup>17</sup>*Singpao*, 29 March 2006, “Lack of Communication; New Immigrant Families having Problems,” A04 Hong Kong News.

<sup>18</sup>*Takungpao*, 29 March 2006, “China–Hongkong Marriage Family Tragedy,” A12 Hong Kong News.

<sup>19</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 June 2006 “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Wife,” P11 Critiques on Current Affair.

reported on an introspection gathering organized by women's associations on the anniversary of the Tin Shui Wai tragedy, in order to arouse public concern on spouse abuse.<sup>20</sup> And *Hong Kong Daily News*<sup>21</sup> and *Apple Daily*<sup>22</sup> examine the wife abuse of new immigrant families and urge the Social Welfare Department to pay more attention to it.

As a whole, reports sympathetic to new immigrant women are less than critical, and most of them merely describe the problem of abuse, instead of exploring the victims' needs or thoughts. To sum up, the social image of new immigrant women is relatively negative.

The social status of new immigrant women is an underprivileged one. They are not only women in a men-dominated society but also housewives dependent on their husbands, and they are mainlanders. This threefold status puts them at a distinct disadvantage socially. They are under the "triple jeopardy" of gender, family role, and national origin. And this triple disadvantage deepens their experience of discrimination. It is a social trap, which turns new immigrant wives into a most victimized group.

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## Contents, Styles, and Approaches of News Reports

This chapter will now analyze in depth the content, style, and approach of news reports and opinion columns concerning new immigrant families and new immigrants.

### Headlines

For a news report, the headline is very important. In a newspaper with more than 100 different

reports, the headline is the major factor for the readers in deciding whether or not to read the report in detail. Even if the readers do not read the contents in detail, the news headlines are enough to give them preliminary impressions of certain events. It is precisely because of this that one can get a glimpse of the news reporters' views on new immigrant families by reading the news headlines about them.

As mentioned earlier, new immigrant families are in general considered an impoverished, marginal social group; all the news headlines emphatically point out that new immigrant families are CSSA families, or destitute families, which need the financial assistance of the government and society. Some headlines emphasize the status of the new immigrants, with new immigrant children as the main target. For example, one of the headlines in *Apple Daily* reads, "Sharp Increase in Numbers of Children Claiming CSSA with Period-of-Residence in Hong Kong Exemption."<sup>23</sup> Another headline in *Singpao* reads: "Number of New immigrant Children Claiming CSSA Shoots up by three Times."<sup>24</sup> And one in *Singtao Daily* reads, "Concern over New immigrant CSSA Children."<sup>25</sup>

However, the subjective discourse in the headlines about domestic violence is even more conspicuous, which gives the readers a negative first impression of new immigrants' marriages. This type of headline draws a direct link between China-Hong Kong marriage and domestic violence. For instance, one of the headlines in *Singtao Daily* reads, "Tang Kwok-wai: New Immigrants and the Third Party as the Main Causes; The Social Welfare Department Reconstructs Family Concept and Reduces Violence."<sup>26</sup> Another headline in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Oriental Daily*, 11 Apr. 2005, "Anniversary of Tin Shui Wai Tragedy—Women's Associations Lash out at Negligence of Wife Abuse," A27 Hong Kong News.

<sup>21</sup> *Hong Kong Daily News*, 3 Aug. 2006, "New Mechanism of Social Welfare Department for Assessing Violent Families," A08 Political Situation.

<sup>22</sup> *Apple Daily*, 25 Sept. 2005, "Abused Women Increased by 30 Times over the Last 30 Years," A15 Hong Kong News.

<sup>23</sup> *Apple Daily*, 3 Apr. 2005, "Number of Children Claiming CSSA with Period of Residence in Hong Kong Exempted has Increased Sharply," A12 Hong Kong News.

<sup>24</sup> *Singpao*, 3 Apr. 2005, "Number of New Immigrant Children Claiming CSSA Shot up by three Times," A05 Hong Kong News.

<sup>25</sup> *Singtao Daily*, 14 Feb. 2005, "Concern with New Immigrant CSSA Children," A03 Highlights.

<sup>26</sup> *Singtao Daily*, 2 Aug. 2006, "Tang Kwok-wai: New Immigrants and the Third Party as the Main Causes; The Social Welfare Department Reconstructs Family Concept and Reduces Violence," A08 Hong Kong News.

*Hong Kong Economic Journal* reads, “Domestic Violence and Marrying a Mainland Woman.”<sup>27</sup> The former quotes someone’s statement as the headline of the article, pointing out that new immigrants are one of the main causes of domestic violence. The latter equates marrying a Mainland woman to domestic violence.

Some articles are even headlined “New Immigrant Family Tragedy”<sup>28</sup> or “China–Hong Kong Marriage Tragedy,”<sup>29</sup> which describe China–Hong Kong marriage as tragedy. Some headlines are even more dramatized and sensational, vividly portraying the family problems of new immigrants in a couple of sentences, for instance: “Wife and children came to Hong Kong years ago, could not adapt to life here, son drowned, new immigrant couple blame each other.”<sup>30</sup> Headlines are more impactful than the contents.

## Wording and Diction

The wording and diction of a news report can most directly and effectively express the reporter’s opinions about the events or persons reported. The media practitioner’s wording and diction should be neutral and must not exaggerate or sensationalize, but my investigation finds that this is not the case.

In reports about new immigrant families and China–Hong Kong marriages, negative phrases and adjectives are often used, such as “mercenary marriage,”<sup>31</sup> “poor and lowly couple,”<sup>32</sup> “high-risk

group,”<sup>33</sup> “source of violence,”<sup>34</sup> “pressure cooker,”<sup>35</sup> “the beginning of tragedy,”<sup>36</sup> “drag on economy,”<sup>37</sup> “enormous baggage,”<sup>38</sup> etc. These phrases obviously demonize new immigrants, distort their image, and put all the blame for societal problems on new immigrants, arousing Hongkongers’ resistance to them, thereby rationalizing Hongkongers’ discrimination against and rejection of new immigrants.

As regards news about new immigrants to Hong Kong and their use of social welfare, the reports tend to use verbs that easily provoke Hongkongers. For instance, “Number of New Immigrant Children Claiming CSSA *Shoots up* by three Times” (*Singpao*)<sup>39</sup>; “So far the Social Welfare Department has granted more than 2,000 applications of children under 18 years old and having resided in Hong Kong for less than one year. The number has *shot up* by three times over the year before”; “Don’t rely on CSSA” (*Apple Daily*)<sup>40</sup>; and “Swarm into Hong Kong” (*Hong Kong Commercial Daily*).<sup>41</sup> Phrases like

<sup>27</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 June 2006, “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Woman,” P11 Critiques on Current Affairs.

<sup>28</sup>*Takungpo*, 22 Feb. 2006, “New Immigrant Family Tragedy,” A12 Hong Kong News.

<sup>29</sup>*Takungpo*, 29 March 2006, “China–Hong Kong Marriage Family Tragedy,” A12 Hong Kong News.

<sup>30</sup>*Mingpao*, 10 July 2006, “Wife and children came to Hong Kong years ago, cannot Adapt themselves to Life here, Son Drowned, New Immigrant Couple Blame Each Other,” A06 Hong Kong News.

<sup>31</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 June 2006, “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Wife,” P11 Critiques on Current Affairs.

<sup>32</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Times*, 1 Dec. 2005, “Marginal World of Hong Kong,” C15 Mood.

<sup>33</sup>*The Sun*, 5 July 2005, “One Abuse Case every Four Families: Child Abuse and Spouse Abuse Increasing; Scholars Advocate Counseling for Abusers,” A11 Local News.

<sup>34</sup>*Singtao Daily*, 2 Aug. 2006, “Tang Kwok-wai: New Immigrants and the Third Party as the Main Causes; The Social Welfare Reconstructs Family Concept and Reduces Violence,” A08 Hong Kong News.

<sup>35</sup>*Mingpao*, 10 July 2006, “Wife and children came to Hong Kong years ago, cannot Adapt themselves to Life here, Son Drowned, New Immigrant Couple Blame Each Other,” A06 Hong Kong News.

<sup>36</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 June 2006, “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Wife,” P11 Critiques on Current Affairs.

<sup>37</sup>*Metro Hong Kong*, 8 March 2006, “Problems still have to be Faced,” P46 Supplement.

<sup>38</sup>*Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, 21 Feb. 2005, “Suggestion that One-way Policy be Readjusted as Soon as Possible,” A05 Hong Kong Commercial Daily Forum.

<sup>39</sup>*Singpao*, 3 Apr. 2005, “Number of New Immigrant Children Claiming CSSA *Shot up* by 3 Times,” A05 Hong Kong News.

<sup>40</sup>*Apple Daily*, 3 Apr. 2005, “Number of Children Claiming CSSA with Period of Residence in Hong Kong Exempted has Increased Sharply,” A12 Hong Kong News.

<sup>41</sup>*Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, 21 Feb. 2005, “Suggestion that One-way Policy be Readjusted as soon as possible,” A05 Commercial Daily Forum.

“increased sharply,” “shot up,” “swarm,” “rely on,” sound as if Hong Kong were invaded by refugees, which make Hong Kong people feel threatened by the “fierce” new immigrants.

### Quotation of Data

In order to raise the credibility and persuasiveness of an article, many mass media quote data or survey reports as evidence. However, whether those data are impartial is debatable. For instance, it is written in one of the articles in *Singtao Daily*: “Among the cases taken over by 61 integrated family-service centers under the Social Welfare Department, the proportion of new immigrants is more than 17% ... China–Hong Kong marriage has become a long-term social problem in Hong Kong.”<sup>42</sup> In accordance with the above report, the proportion of new immigrants seeking help is less than 20%. Logically speaking, problem families born and brought up in Hong Kong amount to more than 80% of the cases dealt with by the Social Welfare Department. They are the crux of the problem. Admittedly the proportion of new immigrant cases is not small, considering the proportion of new immigrant families to the total population of Hong Kong, but the reporters have the new immigrants firmly in their sights and seem to be misleading their readers.

Moreover, according to *Hong Kong Economic Times*, “The proportion of new-immigrant families claiming CSSA tends to be high, and their need for public housing and other welfare services is very intense.... The Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department also has corroborative figures, which are indisputable.”<sup>43</sup> The writer of the article, without raising any solid data as evidence, concludes that the new immigrants’ demand for CSSA or social welfare is very

intense; this kind of assessment of new immigrants is not balanced enough. As mentioned earlier, the proportion of new immigrants seeking CSSA in 2004 is only 14%. And the new immigrants’ share of rented public housing from 2005 to 2006 is only 6%, rather than the “indisputable” high figure implied by the reporter.

Another obvious example is *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* which points out that “There are reporters who announced the statistics of CSSA cases in Hong Kong from 1994 to September 2004, from which it can be seen that new immigrants from mainland China.... get into difficulties and put Hong Kong society and finance under pressure. The number of cases claiming CSSA in Hong Kong in 1994 was 104,807, and it rose in September 2004 to 295,703, representing a rise of 182%.... The CSSA expenditure of the Hong Kong Government rose from HKD 3.4 billion to HKD 17.9 billion, representing a rise of 426.5%. This group of CSSA claimants and unemployed persons are not all new immigrants from mainland China, but it is possible that most of them are new immigrants, especially for newly added CSSA cases.”<sup>44</sup> This article does not mention the source of the data though, judging by the figures, they are probably governmental data.

Nonetheless, the approach of the reporters tends to exaggerate the new immigrants’ impact on Hong Kong finance by manipulating data. The large pile of data cited in their reports represents the social welfare expenses of Hong Kong as a whole, rather than the welfare needs of new immigrants alone. In this way, if the readers are not careful, they will think that new immigrants are the primary cause of the leap in the CSSA expenses of the Hong Kong Government to HKD 17.9 billion. During the 10 years from 1994 to 2004, Hong Kong underwent a financial crisis, deflation and high unemployment, and the economic depression of Hong Kong as a whole directly led to a rise in the number of people claiming CSSA. And this was not due to 150 one-way permit holders “pouring” into Hong

<sup>42</sup> *Singtao Daily*, 2 Aug. 2006, “Tang Kwok-wai: New Immigrants and the Third Party as the Main Causes; The Social Welfare Reconstructs Family Concept and Reduces Violence,” A08 Hong Kong News.

<sup>43</sup> “*Hong Kong Economic Journal*,” 15 June 2006, “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Wife,” P11 Critiques on Current Affairs.

<sup>44</sup> *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, 21 Feb. 2005, “Suggestion that One-way Policy be Readjusted as soon as Possible,” A05 Hong Kong Commercial Daily Forum.

Kong every day. After all, people claiming CSSA are primarily natives or long-established residents of Hong Kong. But the reporters, instead of considering the economic factors, put the blame on the new immigrants by saying that “most of them are new immigrants.”

### Quotation of Expert Statements

Apart from quoting data or survey findings to enhance persuasiveness, the newspapers also often quote other people’s statements (especially experts, academics, local authorities) to support their views. On the one hand, they avoid directly stating their standpoint; on the other hand, these comments provide powerful support for their angle on the issue. In fact, the selection of material itself reflects their angle, and inevitably interpretation is sometimes out of context. For instance, in a report exploring the problem of new immigrant families published in *Singtao*, the reporter quotes a statement made by a social worker (whose name is not mentioned), which brings out the vanity of new immigrant wives. It reads, “A social worker points out that some of the Hong Kong men married to mainland women enjoy a poor standard of living. Quite a few (new immigrant wives), upon coming to Hong Kong, discover that their husbands are just working-class men, who are unlikely to provide them with a comfortable life.... This then leads to such problems as adultery, divorce and even violence.”<sup>45</sup> In fact, the reporter has his or her own standpoint. He or she just employs someone else’s words in order to avoid becoming a target of public criticism. Family problems are not produced by one party only. The report does not mention the responsibility of Hong Kong husbands for domestic violence. This is discriminatory to some extent.

Newspapers publish letters to the editor. Whether a certain letter is published or edited is the newspaper’s choice and responsibility.

Letters to the editor are often carefully selected to fit in with the standpoint of the newspaper. For example, in a letter to the editor published by *Metro Hong Kong*, the reader vigorously criticizes new immigrants for being a burden on Hong Kong society and asks, “How much CSSA does the Hong Kong Government have to pay annually to these (new immigrant) families capable of work?”<sup>46</sup> This could, of course, stir up local hostility to new immigrants.

### Emphasis on New Immigrant Status

In reporting negative news, newspapers often emphasize the new immigrant background of those involved. Sometimes this does not help the reporting of the story at all, but seems to be blatant labeling. When negative news are reported about indigenous Hongkongers, their “status” are seldom mentioned. The media’s prejudice against new immigrants can thus be seen. For example, in a *Hong Kong Daily News* report about a wife abuse incident, the immigrant status of the family is twice mentioned: “A family tragedy almost happened to a new immigrant family in Ko Cheung Court, Yau Tong.... They are a new immigrant family dependent on CSSA.”<sup>47</sup> Because the contents do not explore the wife abuse problem of new immigrant families, it is unnecessary to deliberately mention their status twice. Similarly, concerning a wife abuse and child abuse case, *Singtao Daily*<sup>48</sup> and *Wenweipo*<sup>49</sup> more than once mentioned their new immigrant status, and described the marriage as an “old hus-

<sup>46</sup> *Metro Hong Kong*, 8 March 2006, “Problems still have to be Faced,” P46 Supplement.

<sup>47</sup> *Hong Kong Daily News*, 21 March 2005, “Drunken Beat Wife Wielding a Knife and Holding an eight-year-old Son Facing out for six Hours Subdued by Door-breaking Police,” A07 Hong Kong News.

<sup>48</sup> *Singtao Daily*, 26 March 2006, Drunken Man Trying to Chop Wife Arrested; Child Abuse Exposed, A12 Hong Kong News.

<sup>49</sup> *Wenweipo*, 26 March 2006, “Going into a Spin after Drinking, with Child Abuse Record, Drunken Man Suspected of Attacking Wife with Knife Arrested,” A12 Hong Kong News.

<sup>45</sup> *Singpao*, 29 March 2006, “Lack of Communication; New Immigrant Families having Problems,” A04 Hong Kong News.



band and young wife” problem marriage. It was also mentioned that their speech was so heavily accented that they had difficulty in communicating with their neighbors. The specific mention of background seldom appears in news reports concerning indigenous residents of Hong Kong.

Apart from those wife abuse and child abuse cases, other negative news reports such as those about drug trafficking and indecent assault have similar problems in reporting. For instance, in reporting a three-member family’s drug trafficking case, though unable to prove that the wife was a new immigrant, the reporter quoted District Council Member Kwok Sau Ying, pointing out that new immigrant families had more financial and relationship problems than the locals. The point was also made that, if they went so far as to make money by drug trafficking, the consequences would be far-reaching.<sup>50</sup> Because the case concerned an old husband and a young wife, the reporter presumed that it was a new immigrant family. And then, quoting other people, the reporter wrote that new immigrant families were more likely to fall into vice. This gives readers the wrong impression about new immigrants in Hong Kong. In a news report about a case of sexual assault, the girl victims came from a one-parent family. The report drew attention to their new immigrant status and stressed that the “shameless” culprit would not have had the opportunity to sexually assault the girls had they been looked after by someone.<sup>51</sup> This makes the readers think that new immigrant families are incapable of looking after their young children.

### Comparison with Local Families

My research discovers that some reports compare new immigrant families with local families and either infer the superiority of local families or belittle the social value of new immigrant families.

For example, a *Hong Kong Economic Journal* article points out that the marital structure of new immigrant families has basic problems. Comparing them with local marriages, it says, “Don’t incidents of family violence often occur in new immigrant families?... In fact, they are connected. Indigenous families also include some with an ‘old husband and a young wife’, but compared with new immigrant families, the age difference of local couples is usually not very large.”<sup>52</sup> The article associates family violence with the “old husband young wife” marital structure, and specifically indicates that local Hong Kong marriages will not manifest that kind of phenomenon, giving people the impression that new immigrant families are inferior to Hong Kong families.

In another report exploring the poverty problem of Hong Kong young people, the reporter carries out case studies and explores the economic plight of several young people: “Do not think that they (poor young people) find themselves in this plight because they come from new immigrant families. They come from pure Hong Kong families.”<sup>53</sup> Obviously, the new immigrant families are relegated to an inferior position, as if “pure Hong Kong families” were superior and seldom experienced poverty while new immigrant youngsters generally lived under the poverty line. This is an unsubstantiated claim.

### Selective Attention and Inattention

Among the many reports about new immigrant families, most of them focus on pointing out the new immigrants’ faults, most commonly, poverty, domestic violence, and marital problems. However, in exploring the problems, the papers do not mention how new immigrant families try to solve, often successfully, or face up to the problems. The impression thus given to people is

<sup>50</sup>*Singpa*, 23 Apr. 2005, “Three-member Family at Wong Tai Sin Public Housing Estate Arrested for Drug Trafficking,” A06 Hong Kong News.

<sup>51</sup>*Mingpao*, 19 Aug. 2006, “Victim-child Unguarded; Judge Astonished,” A02 Hong Kong News.

<sup>52</sup>*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 June 2006, “Family Violence and Marrying a Mainland Wife,” P11 Critiques on Current Affairs.

<sup>53</sup>*Mingpao*, 19 Dec. 2005, “Young People are Poor, why?,” D06 Century Humanities, Concern, Horizon.

that they just passively sit there and wait for society to help. In reality, those families are struggling for survival. For example, quite a few new immigrants to Hong Kong actively look for employment by registering at the Labor Department or joining the Employees Retraining Scheme. As regards family violence and marital problems, quite a few new immigrant women turn to social workers for help. For example, Jin Suying, the victim of the Tin Shui Wai family tragedy, had sought help from the Social Welfare Department before the incident, but the Social Welfare Department staff and the police failed to sense the danger, did not take any proper steps, and sent the woman back home to death. In a way, it could be said it was the police and the social worker who killed Suying. The papers, however, did not mention this at all. So the news practitioners report filtered stories rather than complete stories. This may be counted as one of the discriminatory approaches of the papers.

Moreover, China–Hong Kong marriages connect the resources and interpersonal networks of the two regions. This kind of transnationalism occurs inside many families of new immigrants (Chan 2005). Marriage between people of the two regions implies the blurring of the cultural, economic, social, and political demarcation between the two regions and the collective sharing of resources within many transnational households. The resources can be tangible as well as intangible. When new immigrant families make use of Hong Kong resources for their keep, it is quite possible that they also draw on mainland resources. Examples of intangible resources include mainlanders bringing their own education and skills to Hong Kong; examples of social resources include the new immigrant families' mainland friends and relatives being called upon to help take care of their children, and even capital brought by the new immigrants from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong. When a mainland woman comes to settle in Hong Kong, she will sell her mobile or fixed assets (such as real estate and savings) on the Chinese mainland and transfer them to Hong Kong. Although, to judge by the economic condition of new immigrant families, these assets do not seem too significant,

the newspapers may need to retrain from unilaterally reporting how dependent the new immigrants are on the social resources of Hong Kong—without ever mentioning how they use mainland resources to support their lives in Hong Kong. This kind of selective reporting would appear to be discriminatory.

The most remarkable difference between sociology and the mass media is probably that sociology studies the motivation behind people's behavior and the reciprocal influence of the individual and society. It is a science which seeks to explain in depth the various kinds of interaction between the individual, the collective, and society, by way of studying human cognitive behavior, changes in social environment and their social impact. Media practitioners neglect these complexities; they only see the surface of things.

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### **Media's Feelings and Attitudes Towards New Immigrant Families**

The sections earlier prove that the newspapers in general take a negative attitude towards new immigrant families. There are reasons to suspect them of being prejudicial in terms of contents, approach, and standpoint. When the readers absorb information from the papers, they will inevitably be influenced.

However, do the newspapers unequivocally corner the new immigrants and their families? Probably not. The feelings of the media towards new immigrants are complicated and diverse. Not all the media criticize new immigrant families. The sections later will study the media's emotional orientation regarding new immigrant families.

### **Positive Support**

Some media (5% of the reports studied) hold a supportive and solicitous attitude towards new immigrant families. For example, concerning economics, it has already been explored earlier how the newspapers portray new immigrant families as a group of "social parasites" dependent on welfare. When a certain report alleges with fervor

and certainty that the CSSA spent by the government on new immigrants is estimated at HKD 2.1 billion (the method of calculation is not specified),<sup>54</sup> there are also reports indignant at the injustice. For example, according to *Mingpao*, "Among the new immigrant families added every year, only 10% successfully claim CSSA. Quite a few new immigrants rely on their own efforts. Some of the families even make a living by picking cartoon paper off the streets to re-sell. So our society should not discriminate against them."<sup>55</sup> An article in the *Hong Kong Economic Times* mentions: "In fact, in Hong Kong, the poverty caused by 'new immigrants' is not serious. Before the Social Welfare Department introduced the rule that 'new immigrants' who have resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years cannot claim CSSA, only 14% of CSSA applicants came from new immigrant families. It can thus be seen that the financial burden brought about by the new immigrants to the Hong Kong Government is not so serious as generally imagined."<sup>56</sup> Although this kind of "rehabilitative" report appears infrequently, they speak fairly on behalf of new immigrant families and enable the readers to view new immigrants more positively. Similarly, some real estate agents even point out that Chinese landlords generally like to rent their flats to new immigrant families, because they are more reliable and less likely to be behind with the rent. Also, new immigrant couples all go out to work and provide two sources of income, guaranteeing the payment of rent.<sup>57</sup> The reports mentioned earlier evaluate new immigrants in a more positive light, praising them for being conscientious and "going out to work," thereby building a diligent and dutiful image of them. But it is only a drop in

the ocean; the media's evaluation of new immigrants is predominantly negative.

Although the Hong Kong media generally think that new immigrants from the Chinese mainland will increase the financial burden to the Hong Kong government, there are also reports which positively stress that the arrival of school-age children brings hope to Hong Kong, helping to alleviate the challenges of an aging local population, and reducing the danger of village schools being closed down by the government due to low student intake.<sup>58</sup> These reports make the readers view this "fresh force" positively.

Besides having nice words for new immigrant families, some reports also sympathize with their experiences or remind Hong Kong people and the government to pay more attention to the needs of the new immigrants. For example, an *Oriental Daily* report concerned with new immigrants lists the faults of the Social Welfare Department and criticizes its bureaucracy for leaving the new immigrant families with no one to turn to for help. It accuses them of failing to prevent family tragedies from happening. The article also suggests that the Social Welfare Department treat new immigrants seeking help with positive and encouraging words rather than impatience and ridicule.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, a *Wenweipo* article concerned with new immigrant family tragedies explores the bewilderment of new immigrant families and suggests that government departments coordinate with each other to solve the problem fundamentally and structurally.<sup>60</sup> Besides spurring on the government regarding its policies, some reports such as the one published by *Metro Hong Kong* also reminds Hongkongers to support new immigrants, to extend sympathy to South Asian victims

<sup>54</sup> *Oriental Daily*, 9 Apr. 2005, "Take Care of Underprivileged New Immigrants, Social Welfare must not be Bureaucratic," A30 Kungfu Tea.

<sup>55</sup> *Mingpao*, 14 Feb. 2006, "Social Worker: New Immigrant Families should Pour out their Worries to Relatives and Friends," A08 Hong Kong News.

<sup>56</sup> *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 6 May 2006, "Poverty and Zen Cultivation," P05 Critiques on Hong Kong and China.

<sup>57</sup> *Hong Kong Daily News*, 3 Sept. 2006, Family Tenants Safer for Chinese Mansions for Rent, B03 Real Estates.

<sup>58</sup> *Takungpo*, 3 March 2005, "The Hope of the Disastrous School Area Northwest New Territories; New Immigrant School Age Children Help Village School to Avoid Being Closed," A14 Hong Kong News.

<sup>59</sup> *Oriental Daily*, 9 Apr. 2005, "Take Care of Underprivileged New Immigrants, Social Welfare must not be Bureaucratic," A30 Kungfu Tea.

<sup>60</sup> *Wenweipo*, 18 Jan. 2005, "Special Topic: Chow Wing Sun: Family Tragedy Comes from Mercenary Marriage," A21 Hong Kong Focus.

of natural calamities, and to stop sowing discord and discrimination.<sup>61</sup>

### Sowing Discord and Driving a Wedge

As I have mentioned earlier, most Hong Kong newspaper reports about new immigrants from the mainland are primarily negative. Some even semiconsciously sow discord between indigenous Hongkongers and new immigrants from the mainland, stirring up antagonism and conflict between the two groups. The influence is significant and long-lasting. The most remarkable example is rejecting new immigrants from the mainland on the grounds of Hong Kong's financial burden and exaggerating their demand for housing, medical care, education, and CSSA. To the middle class working hard in Hong Kong and toiling in order to pay income tax and profits tax, this indeed hits the nail on the head—and they all become hostile towards new immigrants.

Apart from the economic factor, the media often play up the family problems of new immigrants. Although they do have family/marriage problems, the orientation of the newspapers is not to be concerned with incidents or facts, but to portray the family problems of new immigrants as "the time bomb in Hong Kong society." Such phrases as "Reunited family means violent episode," "The violent atmosphere of society is rising steadily," "high-risk group for domestic violence," have already been mentioned earlier. Those reports all prejudice the readers against new immigrant families. Unfortunately, news about harmony in new immigrant families, between father and son, between husband and wife, has not appeared. As it happens, the readers' image of these families has become one-sided.

### Ambivalence

Ambivalence is a complicated emotion, which combines love with hate and gives rise to inner

conflict. And Hong Kong people are probably ambivalent towards new immigrants from the mainland to Hong Kong. Hong Kong people and mainlanders have the same origin. Hong Kong has always been an immigrant city. The 1970s and 1980s were the peak period of migration from the mainland to Hong Kong. The so-called indigenous Hong Kong people are in fact children of the older generation who moved from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong. In terms of identification, race, and ethnicity, both Hong Kong people and the new immigrants are Chinese.

However, there are differences between the two groups despite their similarities. In respect of education, culture, background, language, etc., new immigrants from mainland China differ significantly from Hongkongers. Hong Kong people's lack of understanding of their living habits often develops into rejection and detestation. Hong Kong people regard new immigrants as "those mainlanders," rather than "fellow-Hongkongers," and thus keep them out of the mainstream society. The feelings of intimacy (same race) and alienation (different ethnicities) battle with each other to give rise to complicated feelings of ambivalence.

Complicated ambivalent feelings are not rare in news reports. For instance, in a report in *Economic Journal* about the poverty of new immigrant families, the impoverished life of new immigrants is brought out through an interview with a mainland female holder of a two-way permit, who must return to the mainland after her visit to Hong Kong. The writer of the report not only is concerned with the economic problems and psychological pressures of the new immigrants but also points out that quite a few new immigrants are self-reliant, and that the financial burden created by them for the Government of Hong Kong is not as serious as generally imagined.

However, the writer then suddenly changes his tone and says, "In the long run, the daily quota of 150 new immigrants to Hong Kong increases the population of Hong Kong by more than 50,000 annually. If these 50,000 people are mostly from low-income families, they will constitute a heavy

<sup>61</sup> *Metro Hong Kong*, 17 Jan. 2005, "Help Sans Frontiers," P36 Living.

burden for the welfare, medical care and education of Hong Kong.”<sup>62</sup> It can thus be seen that the writer, on the one hand, sympathizes with the experiences of the new immigrants and does not want Hong Kong people to discriminate against them. But, on the other hand, he is concerned that too many low-income families pouring into Hong Kong will encumber Hong Kong’s future. The battle between the writer’s feelings and “reality” is indeed intense.

Another similar instance is an *Oriental Daily* news report concerned with the new immigrants’ needs. The writer of that article supports the government’s tightening up of its CSSA policy regarding the new immigrants, so that they will not be overly dependent on CSSA and fail to make use of their own talents. The report also points out that, given the financial deficit, the government has been “magnanimous” in increasing instead of decreasing its assistance to the new immigrants. However, the writer not only objects to the new immigrants abusing public monies, but also urges the government to help new immigrants really in need, to take care of underprivileged groups, and to get rid of bureaucratic practices.<sup>63</sup> The writer’s loving reproachfulness towards the new immigrants makes intriguing reading.

The media are ambivalent towards the new immigrants, intertwining feelings of intimacy and estrangement, and forming a mentality of both acceptance and rejection. This is also the general attitude of Hong Kong people towards the new immigrants—at the same time sympathetic and discriminatory.

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## Conclusion

Since information flow is well developed in Hong Kong and the pace of life is fast, newspapers have become one of the important ways by which Hong

Kong people identify with society and understand current affairs. And this is also one of the channels through which Hongkongers know about new immigrants from the mainland. The readers are inevitably influenced by the attitude or orientation of the media, the government, Hong Kong people, academics, etc. in developing their own attitude towards new immigrant families. The influence of the media and society is a catalyst, igniting prejudice and discrimination against new immigrants from the mainland on the part of a large number of Hongkongers. The prejudice resides in the fact that, although you may have never known or contacted those people, you have already formed, through tendentious reporting in the media, a set of opinions about them. You come to believe that these opinions are “facts”—which are merely “a reality constructed by society.” This study finds that newspaper “facts” are created through such techniques as exaggeration, distortion, sensationalizing, scapegoating, stereotyping, etc. These approaches are all-powerful weapons with which to construct or damage the image of a group.

In general, the social status of new immigrants from the mainland is low. They are labeled by society as an impoverished, lazy group dependent on CSSA. As time goes by, the new immigrants accept those labels and stigmas, internalize them, come to believe in society’s view of themselves, and gradually lose their self-respect. Also, they absorb the expectations of society and the authorities so that the prophecies become self-fulfilling. The more the new immigrants give up their own self-worth, the more justified society feels in stereotyping them, thus forming a vicious cycle.

In respect of family, the media also tend to attack new immigrant women, although most of them are victims. Not only do they suffer rejection by mainstream society, but they are also condemned to a low standard of living. Some of them are abused by their husbands. The papers, however, describe them as having only themselves to blame. This phenomenon of shifting the responsibility onto the victim is what sociologists call “blaming the victim.” Those victims not only are obliged to take responsibility for their plight, but also internalize those mainstream concepts, accepting and approving of the abuse,

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<sup>62</sup> *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 6 May 2006, “Poverty and Zen Cultivation,” P05 Critiques on Hong Kong and China.

<sup>63</sup> *Oriental Daily*, 9 Apr. 2005, “Take Care of Underprivileged New Immigrants, Social Welfare must not be Bureaucratic,” A30 Kungfu Tea.



so that the victims eventually come to blame themselves and hold themselves responsible for their own plight. Precisely because new immigrants are housewives without the ability to make money, and mainlanders, they suffer the triple jeopardy of gender, family status, and national origin, and become a most victimized group among the new immigrants.

From my textual analysis it can be seen that the newspapers are prejudiced against new immigrants and their families in terms of content and approach, deeply embedded in which is an emotional bias. However, this emotion is not pure hate, but something more complicated and diverse: a love-hate relationship. The role of the new immigrant is that of both insider and outsider, and it is impossible to clearly fathom Hongkongers' feelings towards new immigrants from the mainland.

The newspapers have always been closely connected with their readers, both depending on and influencing each other. The media influence readers' views on social affairs; the mainstream culture and social cognition of readers in turn influence the reporting orientation of the media. The two parties are like two groups of people who keep discussing "it" (the new immigrants) and define "it" in terms an image they have molded together. The "dialogue" and collusion between the two results in the social values we see in Hong Kong today.

The economic environment and social development in Hong Kong and those of its motherland keep changing throughout the years. Nowadays income and living standards are soaring in the mainland. It is predictable that the mainlanders will no longer be our "poor relatives" and Hong Kong is no longer a place they desire. By that time, the sentiment between Hongkongers and mainlanders will face a fundamental change.

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## Part II

# The Family Life Cycle

## To Be or Not to Be: Chinese-Singaporean Women Deliberating on Voluntary Childlessness

Amanda Ee Hui Li, Caroline Plüss,  
and Chan Kwok-bun

This chapter reports on our study of the self-justifications and internal conversations, or self dialogues, of 16 married Chinese-Singaporean women about their deliberations on voluntary childlessness. The sample of our study consisted of higher-skilled (H) and lower-skilled (L) women. We used the social exchange framework of Levinger (1982) and Chan (2010) to explain these women's justifications of their choices. More precisely, we examined how the women explained their decisions as a result of their cost-benefit analyses in the context of their perceptions of four crucial social agents: husbands, workplace, extended families and Singapore society. Our findings show that the women's reflections were varied and diverse. Differences stemmed from their education levels and from the multiple intersections of the women's perceptions of their relations with their social agents. Our data show that the women's decisions were

most strongly motivated by their attempts to arbitrate financial costs, their wishes to pursue a career and their assessment that their husbands would not contribute much to childrearing. Purely financial considerations were more strongly expressed by the lower-skilled women, yet both groups of higher-skilled and lower-skilled women lamented that extended families and Singapore society would not provide sufficient help to alleviate their burden in child care.

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### The Social Discourse on Parenthood in Singapore

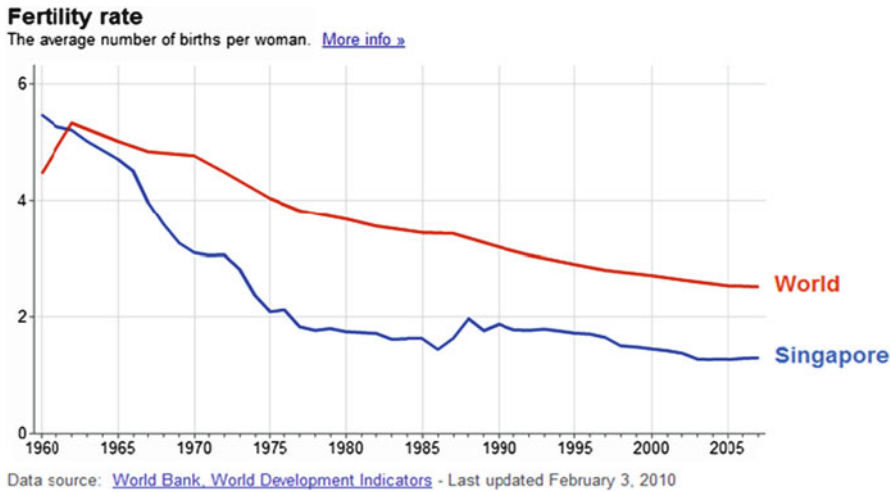
Gaining insights into women's cost-and-benefit analyses and self-dialogues vis-a-vis the four powerful social agents is especially important to our understanding of Chinese-Singaporeans' spousal relations in an age of increasing globalization and high modernity, or postmodernity, which propel people to make self-reflexivity one of the fundamental strategies of relating to others in social life (Giddens 1993). Such self-reflexivity has become a crucial element in advanced industrialized and knowledge-driven economies, where birthrates are too low for populations to replace themselves (Rindfuss and Brewster 1996, p. 258), leaving these societies with little choice but to rely on immigration, or to finding new ways to re-structure their economies. Our results shed new light on the problematique of low birth rates. Concerns about the decreasing fertility rate have led the Singaporean government to transform the

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**Fig. 13.1** Comparison of fertility rate trends between Singapore and the world. Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators (2010)

“private matter” of procreation into a subject of national, even nationalistic, discourse (Thang 2005; Pereira 2006, p. 65; Straughan 2006, p. 1; Thang 2005, p. 76). The lack of babies has been a topic in National Day rally speeches made by successive prime ministers. The current prime minister stresses that this “intensely personal business” is a “serious... national problem” (Lee 2004, p. 22).

Figure 13.1 shows that Singapore’s Total Fertility Rate (TFR)<sup>1</sup> fell from an average of five children per woman in the 1960s to 1.96 in 1988, and to a current record low of 1.20 (Singapore Statistics. 2012). Singapore is far below the natural replacement level of 2.1,<sup>2</sup> resulting in Singapore being ranked third<sup>3</sup> in

lowest fertility in a survey of 224 countries. Singapore’s fertility rate certainly is low, both at an absolute level and relative to other countries. The declining birth rate in Singapore is feared to have repercussions on economic growth and social stability (Pereira 2006, p. 65), not least because a low birthrate calls for increasing immigration of people from other countries and some voices expressed that this will change the culture of the city–state. Associated fears pertain to a perceived dearth in the quantity and quality of the workforce and of the Singapore Armed Forces (Anonymous 2000a, b).

In Singapore, as in most other modern societies, parenthood is lauded to be a desirable albeit normative social role. Almost all societies are pro-natalistic to a certain extent. As Veevers (1980, p. 3) observed, across different cultures and societies, there are two pervasive social expectations of married couples: they should have children, and they should want to have children. These pro-natalistic values form the foundation of

<sup>1</sup> The TFR is said to be a more accurate indicator of the fertility level in a country than the crude birth rate (number of live births per population, expressed in per 1,000 population per year), as TFR refers to the average number of births per woman in her lifetime, taking into account the sex distribution of the population.

<sup>2</sup> In “developed countries,” a rate of 2.1 children per woman is considered to be the ideal replacement level, “at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next” (Craig 1994, p. 20), and at which the population will remain stable, assuming no immigration or emigration takes place.

<sup>3</sup> In a survey on lowest fertility rates conducted by CIA World Factbook (2009), out of the 224 sovereign states, Singapore ranked third, just behind fellow Asian cities Hong Kong and Macau.



**Fig. 13.2** Children. Life would be empty without them. Source: Ministry of Community Development, Youths and Sport

societal beliefs about the ideal family. Singapore is no exception. Singapore’s 1987 campaign poster by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports declares: “Children. Life would be empty without them” (Fig. 13.2). This example epitomizes Singapore society’s construction of the family ideal: one that has children; without children, the family is incomplete. As Daly (1988, p. 42) opined, a family is defined as such only with parenting. It is the accomplishment of having children, rather than marriage, which propels the couple into familyhood.

Following Marshall (1993, p. 12), voluntary childlessness contradicts such pro-natalistic values. We define voluntarily childless women as those who are legally married; childless; to the best of their knowledge, fertile; and as not wanting to ever have children.

With the availability and convenience of reliable birth-control methods, having, or not having, children is by now largely a matter of preference and choice, enabling married couples to reflect and to *choose* to be childless or not. Moreover, certain developments in contemporary Singapore society, such as in the growth in the female labor force participation, from a mere

**Table 13.1** Labor force participation rate by gender (%)

Year	Males	Females
1970	67.6	24.6
1980	81.5	44.3
1990	79	53
2000	76.6	50.2
2004	75.6	54.2
2009	88.3	63.9

Sources: 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 figures from Population Census, 2004 and 2009 figures from Labor Force Surveys 2009

24.6% in 1970 to 63.9% in 2009 (see Table 13.1), and increase in individualism (Taussig 1997), have brought the institution of parenthood into public discussion.

Singaporean couples, more than ever, are now *calculating* the advantages and disadvantages of having children. Lee (2008) observes that the decision to have children is postponed in Singapore until potential parents arrive at the “ideal moment” to have children, this ideal being the minimization of sacrifices that bearing and raising children require. Chan (2010) supported this view, thinking that women in Singapore are not “spoilt princesses” who avoid the burden of motherhood; rather, they debate with themselves if they are sufficiently prepared to have children. For example, a woman writer in Singapore expressed that she lacked the mental and emotional energy and could not sacrifice the loss of privacy that would result from a decision to have children at a late stage in her life (Tan 2011). Achieving affluence and a higher degree of social mobility are strong reasons deterring Singaporean women from having children (Leong 2010), along with other reasons such as fear of not being able to cope with the stresses of parenthood (Chew 2010) and glorification of “career women” in Singapore society (Niaz 2010). Singaporean wives have long complained about the “mindset” of their husbands, wishing to get help from their spouses in childcare (Skadian 2008). These women called for more understanding from their workplace and their own families regarding the pressures they face when having children (Yee 2008), and for more equality between themselves and their husbands in raising children and doing housework (Anonymous 2010).



The Singaporean government periodically announces different incentives for couples to have children, such as free childcare and (more) paid paternity leave (Tan 2008), longer child care leave and a lower levy for employing live-in domestic helpers (Li 2011). A social stigma is constructed and attached to married couples remaining childless: they are viewed as “unnatural” and “selfish” (Hickey 2006), “individualistic” and “avoiding adulthood and its responsibilities” (Leong 2010), or “self-centered and narcissistic” (Ong 2011). The Singaporean sociologist Teo (2011) is against such labeling, drawing attention to the social context, especially Singapore’s emphasis on wealth and materialism, that needs to change to effectively address the problem of Singapore’s low birth rates.

To study the internal deliberations of the 16 married Chinese-Singaporean women, we gathered data on how higher- and lower-skilled wives situated their self-justifications in the context of their perceptions of the differences between their own and their husbands’ ideals about gender roles, the discrepancy in the work-family-fit that child bearing and rearing would increase, and of the weight they give to the cost of loss in personal freedom and spare time—when they justify their decision to their extended families (this loss is also understood to be affecting spousal relations). This chapter will also probe the interrelations and mutual constitutivity of different factors to gain a composite picture of the women’s choices.

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## The Literature on Voluntary Childlessness

Our study drew from theory and research in social psychology, specifically ideas on perception and cognition, rationalizations and self-justifications and, to a lesser extent, social exchange (Aronson 2008). Social psychologists do not see humans as rational animals, but rather as rationalizing beings. Commonsensically, we tend to say that we first have an attitude or a feeling, which is internal and can sometimes only be inferred or grasped intuitively, which then leads to or results in a behavior, which is external, visible, and observable by both

actor and others. The internals affect the externals. I love you so much so I marry you. In the context of our study on voluntary childlessness, we then have this rather familiar scenario: I think babies are cute, I love babies, so I will have babies, the more, the merrier. However, thinking counter-intuitively, would it be possible that we act first, and then engage in internal conversations with oneself, rationalize, or make self-justifications of our conduct? The externals affect the internals. I married you so I began to love you.

Here the initial scenario is now reversed: I am child-free, a lifestyle that suits me best; knowing too well about the pro-natalist discourse in society, I practice self-talk, in fact, self-persuasion. Whether it is the first or the second scenario, whether it is about married *and* unmarried women deliberating about having babies and not having babies, humans often feel uncomfortable about, sometimes stressed, if not distressed, by a misfit or incongruity of attitude and behavior, a condition called cognitive dissonance by social psychologists. Dissonance induces anxiety and humans must reduce it, either by aligning behavior with attitude, or the other way round. As it happens, “the other way round,” that is, self-talk, self-persuasion, self-justification, rationalization, or whatever you call it, is often, comparatively speaking, a less painful, costly, consequential course of action. So we “fix the internals” rather than the externals—to make us feel good, logical, right, rational. In other words, we rationalize ourselves into rationality.

Our study also drew insights from social exchange theory. Levinger (1982) used the theory to make sense of divorce and separation in the USA. Co-author of this chapter, Chan, in Chap. 19 of this handbook, used it to explain philanthropy and charity in Hong Kong. A dominant perspective in social psychology, the idea of social exchange is borrowed from economics and its model of the economic man which, among other things, see humans as acting, consciously rationally, on the basis of costs-and-benefits analyses, or calculations of gains and losses, pros and cons, pluses and minuses. As a world-view or mode of thinking *and* acting, it has much currency in modernism, capitalism,

commercialism, neo-liberalism. But the social psychology of social exchange has one noteworthy emphasis that merits our special attention here: the theory deals with *perceived* costs and *perceived* benefits, in fact an *artificial* balance of costs and benefits “in the eyes of the beholder,” thus the salience of perception and cognition, of the actor’s subjectivity and internal states. Is the glass half empty or half full? In the actor’s mind, what makes babies attractive, unattractive, costly, beneficial, rewarding, unrewarding, gratifying, ungratifying?

In terms of theory, whether our study being reported here is about rationalization, attitude and behavior, cognitive dissonance and its reduction, perception and cognition, or social exchange, our analytical gaze is, perhaps rightly so, at the “conversations with self,” at how humans as subject, the “I,” talk with themselves as object, the “me,” but never for a moment forgetting the audience, the psychologist reminds us. In the case of our study, the audience comprises our women respondents’ significant others, i.e., husbands, extended family, employers and, of course, Singapore society and its discourse on parenthood.

Finley (1986, p. 1118) studied women’s perceptions of the definitions of gender roles in their marriage, especially their assessment of whether their husbands would subscribe to the normative societal ideal that husbands engage in the public arena of work to economically provide for the family and they would like their wives to remain at home to provide emotional support for the family members and create a home in the private sphere. In our study, we guided our respondents to ask questions about such ideals. In addition, we paid special attention to the argument that women who wish to continue working while having children would not be able to live up to their commitments to family and work, resulting in their decisions not to have children (Lee et al. 1999, p. 6; Brewster and Rindfuss 2000, p. 271). Wax (2004, p. 44), using the analogy of a “rat race” to mimic the politics of law firms, concluded that for women working there, the situation is either “up-or-out.” Although research found that many women working in competitive and highly skilled

professions “would vote to work fewer hours for less pay” (Wax 2004, p. 44), the “rat race” nevertheless contributed to such women’s childlessness decisions: the corporate culture inadvertently colluded with husbands to keep women lawyers in conditions of structural disadvantage (Queneau and Marmo 2001, p. 60).

One explanation of this phenomenon is that the marked increase of women’s participation in the labor force did not significantly change the gender division of household and child care chores, which are still largely traditional and stay as women’s work (Lee et al. 1999). Suggestions on how to increase working mothers’ well-being include shorter, more predictable yet flexible working hours, part-time or job-sharing options, time off for child care and emergencies, guaranteed maternity leave for childbearing and rearing while enjoying job security, child care subsidies and tax rebates, and on-site day care (Wax 2004, p. 36). Wax (2004, p. 37) recommended that some work environments should get rid of the “mommy track” at the workplace: there is a stigma attached to mothers (and future or potential mothers) as being incompetent or not as career-minded as other employees. The “mommy track” reality has prevented women from choosing to be a mother (Wax 2004). Several researchers (Risman et al. 1999, p. 320; Queneau and Marmo 2001, p. 60) confirmed that the character of legal provisions and corporate cultures, in addition to couple’s choices and preferences, has been shown to co-determine the number of children (if any) women bear.

An important factor motivating our women’s childlessness decision is their perception of their husbands as not an “acceptable, willing co-parent.” This fact was found in studies of voluntary childlessness done in Australia. Carmichael and Whittaker (2007, pp. 111–115) suggested that it is one of the deciding factors associated with contemporary childlessness. Conscious decisions to remain childless were also found to be based on couples’ perceptions of lifestyle opportunity costs that parenthood would incur. Among the couples in Australia who rejected parenthood, there was a strong “desire to give other things priority in their lives.” Carmichael and Whittaker

(2007, p. 114) also found surprisingly that a small number of women rejected the idea of motherhood even in an early stage of their lives. Although the question of financial costs was brought up by the couples studied, these costs were not found to be a significant factor in rejecting parenthood. Rather, in Australia, the lack in finances to raise children only surfaced in the couples’ deliberations on whether to have *additional* children.

Pereira (2006) researched the question if Singaporean family values are related to the city–state’s current low fertility rates. He found that most Singaporeans strongly value the institutions of marriage and family, and are “generally pro-children.” His findings suggest that in Singapore, there is a significant disparity between the “ideals and reality in society” (Coleman quoted in Pereira 2006, p. 81). While a large majority of Singaporeans value nuptials, parenthood and childbearing, the stark reality is that many of them do not have children. Pereira thought that although young Singaporeans have individualistic mindsets, they still fully subscribe to strong family values: they would like to get married and have children, but they have difficulties in translating these ideals into reality. He concluded that the state should focus on pro-family campaigns rather than on improving family values (Pereira 2006, p. 82).

## Research Methods and Data Collection

Our study of voluntary childlessness used qualitative research methods to capture the experiences of our respondents. In-depth semi-standardized interviews (Berg 2006, p. 95) were conducted with 16 voluntarily childless working women. This method involved working with an initial set of predetermined topics or questions, while giving the respondents the option to digress and mention other topics. The method aims to extract rich and detailed information, encouraging the respondents to converse freely about their reasoning and decision-making. To provide more explanation of Chinese-Singaporean women’s childlessness choice, we also looked at the interrelations and

**Table 13.2** Resident total fertility rate by ethnicity

	1998	2003	2008
Overall	1.48	1.27	1.28
Chinese	1.27	1.09	1.14
Malays	2.48	2.10	1.91
Indians	1.68	1.39	1.19

Source: National Population Secretariat Population in Brief 2009

mutual constitutivity of factors that higher- and lower-skilled women associated with the costs and benefits of having and not having children.

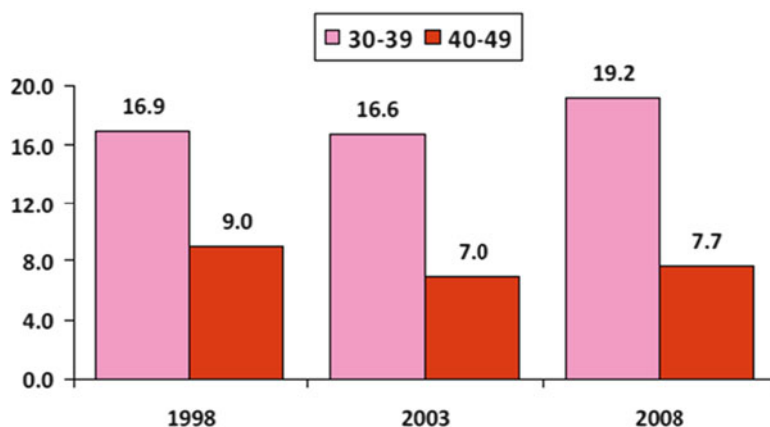
The women were interviewed face-to-face in the absence of husbands so as to reduce the possibility of outside influence and to increase the validity of our data. Due to the sensitive nature of our topic, tact was used when asking personal questions. The interview questions were sequenced to begin with innocuous and non-threatening demographic matters—for respondents to answer easily and for rapport to be developed (Berg 2006, p. 105). As the interviewer herself did not have the same experiences as the interviewees, the strategy of “echoing” was used to augment genuine listening and encourage elaborations (Berg 2006, p. 128). Our study was conducted overtly; the respondents all gave their verbal informed consent (Berg 2006; Babbie 2004). All interviews were voice-recorded.

The research was limited to Chinese-Singaporean women for two reasons. In recent years, the TFR of the Chinese has been consistently the lowest among the main ethnic groups in Singapore (see Table 13.2).

In 2008, when the overall national TFR was 1.28, that of Singaporean-Chinese women was 1.14 (National Population Secretariat 2009, p. 26). Data on just one ethnic group will eliminate the confounding effects of ethnicity that will confound the interpretation of data from a relatively small sample.

To obtain the sample, snowball sampling technique<sup>4</sup> was employed. From the contacts that

<sup>4</sup>Snowball sampling method is when each person interviewed is asked to recommend additional people (who fit the criteria) for interviewing (Babbie 2004, p. 184).



**Fig. 13.3** Proportion of ever-married citizen females aged 30–49 years who are childless (%). Source: National Population Secretariat, *Population in Brief* (2009)

formed the preliminary sample, we obtained referrals to relatives or acquaintances who met the criteria of voluntary childlessness and who were willing to be interviewed.

As our interviews were conducted, we incidentally found that all of our respondents and their husbands were in full-time employment; thus as couples they were among the D.I.N.K.S (Double Income No Kids). The respondents' division into the two categories of lower-skilled and higher-skilled workers was not based on monthly income but on highest educational achievement. The cut-off point to being included in the higher-skilled group was to have at least a bachelor's degree.

Finding the voluntarily childless women was challenging. They were a very small minority of Singapore's population and were thus members of a niche community. According to the population census by National Population Secretariat (2009), there were fewer than two in ten ever-married females aged 30–39 who remained childless (National Population Secretariat 2009, p. 12) (Fig. 13.3).

Also, the mere absence of children was not the sole determinant of inclusion in our study sample, as even when childless women were found, one could not ascertain if the women were childless because they might simply be delaying parenthood, were involuntarily childless due to fertility problems (of wife or husband or both), or were voluntarily childless.

Furthermore, it was awkward to probe such a personal and private issue, which may upset or even offend (although unintentionally) some respondents. To lessen any possible discomfort, as mentioned above, the interview schedule was organized in such a way that it started with gathering comparatively less sensitive information about their job, education level, and length of marriage, before moving on to more sensitive questions (Berg 2006, p. 105). Asking questions to distinguish if the interviewee was childless by choice or by circumstance was especially tricky. Many of the voluntarily childless women in our sample were initially tight-lipped about their reasoning (Table 13.3).

The 16 respondents were all within Marshall's (1993) criteria. At the time of the interview, these women were legally married, childless, fertile to the best of their knowledge, and self-defined as never wanting children. In terms of highest education level attained, eight respondents were considered as highly skilled (H), having obtained a minimum of a Bachelor's degree (including two with a Masters and one with a Doctorate). The other eight respondents were classified as lower-skilled (L), with three having "O" level qualifications as their highest educational attainment, while the rest were diploma holders. The interviewees were all engaged in full-time paid employment in different industries—from administrative positions, sales, to

**Table 13.3** Demographic characteristics of study sample

S/N	Age	Years of marriage	Age at marriage	Monthly income	Education	Occupation
H1	33	4	29	\$8,000	Degree	Banker
H2	29	2	27	\$3,500	Degree	Marketing Exec
H3	39	5	34	\$7,500	Masters	AGM of small firm
H4	31	2	29	\$6,000	Degree	Business Consultant
H5	40	7	33	\$6,500	Degree	Lawyer
H6	42	12	30	\$6,000	Doctorate	Lecturer
H7	35	4	31	\$9,500	Masters	Investment Banker
H8	32	5	27	\$3,000	Degree	PR Manager
L1	33	6	27	\$3,000	Diploma	Insurance Agent
L2	34	7	27	\$2,500	Diploma	Optometrist
L3	35	12	26	\$2,400	O Levels	Personal Assistant
L4	36	9	27	\$1,700	O Levels	Admin Officer
L5	35	4	31	\$2500	Diploma	Property Agent
L6	30	2	28	\$2,400	Diploma	Photographer
L7	37	11	26	\$1,500	O Levels	Clinic Assistant
L8	43	14	29	\$2,800	Diploma	Logistics Manager
Average	35.44	6.63	28.81	\$4,300		
Average for H	35.13	5.13	30.00	\$6,250		
Average for L	35.75	8.13	27.63	\$2,350		

working in the legal profession and in finance. Their monthly income ranged from S\$1,500 to S\$9,500. As we did not have information on their total household income (which includes their husbands' income), it was difficult to comment on their social class status.

The range of the voluntarily childless respondents' ages was between 29 and 43 years. All of these women had passed the 2008 median age (29.4) of citizen mothers at first births (National Population Secretariat 2009, p. 11). The average age of the respondents was 35.4,<sup>5</sup> with a large majority of the respondents in their thirties. The exceptions were one woman at 29 and three women aged 40 and above. They were married for duration between two and 15 years, the average being 6.6 years. From these two figures, we calculated the age at which they got married. The respondents' age at marriage ranged from 26 to 34 years old, with an average of 28.8 and, more specifically, 30.0 for the higher-skilled and 27.6 for the lower-skilled. In comparison to 26.3,

the 2003<sup>6</sup> national average age of women at first marriage (National Population Secretariat 2009, p. 9), our childless female respondents married at a significantly older age.

Right from the start, our interviews indicated that the women's reasons for wanting to remain without children were varied and diverse. For analytical clarity, we grouped the women's reasons into the four intersecting sections of perceptions of spousal relations, negotiating employment, reasoning the childlessness choice with extended family, and situating the voluntary childlessness decision in the Singapore society context. This thematic categorization also distinguished between the motivations of the higher (H)- and lower (L)-skilled women.

<sup>6</sup>We used the 2003 figures (even though we had data for 2008, which were more recent) because our respondents were married an average of 6.6 years ago (7 years ago before 2010, i.e., 2003).

<sup>5</sup>All figures were corrected to 1 decimal place.



## Perceptions of Spousal Relations

Starting with the relationship closest to the women's heart, that with her husband, we observed several concerns the women had about how their husbands would (not) contribute to childrearing. For all of the women in our sample, the decision of never wanting children was a gradual one, with no one single incident suddenly turning them off children. What was interesting about these women was how they had to negotiate their childlessness status with their husbands. In *all* cases, it was the women who persuaded their husbands not to have children. A few women had persuaded their husbands *before* marriage about having a childless relationship. The "childlessness clause" in the marital agreement was not formal but nonetheless binding, an explicit verbal agreement to never get involved in parental roles. The clause bonds and binds. All bondages bind, or there is no bonding without it being binding.

Other respondents (those who did not have a "childlessness clause") mentioned that their childlessness intention came only after marriage, apparently as a mutual decision between husband and wife. Not all respondents went "public" about their decision, especially those who had not been married all that long. They had not told their extended families of their childlessness choice. This might have been because although a few respondents noted that the social stigma of childless couples had decreased over the years, they were aware and fearful of the pressure exerted by their parents and in-laws.

## Curtailing Freedom and Time

After the incompatibility of career and motherhood, the second most cited reason for voluntary childlessness was the curtailing of freedom and time. The negative impact on autonomy and time for oneself and husband was quoted by eight out of 16 respondents as being very important to them; if they were to have a child, they reasoned, they would be "robbed" of these two valuable

elements of their present lifestyle. Our respondents felt that, in order to be a good mother, one must devote an inordinate amount of time to the child, to the point of abandoning many other gratifications of their lifestyle, such as from work, friends, travel, leisure, or even one's spouse:

My whole life will revolve around the kid, feeding, changing diapers, and bedtime stories. No more impromptu activities like suppers or holidays. We'll need to plan ahead, bring pram, diapers, milk powder, extra clothes. (L6)

The respondents perceived the presence of a child to be a hindrance to enjoying myriad opportunities for autonomy and spontaneity.

The perception of the need to invest a huge amount of time and energy in raising children can be seen as an internalization of the ideology of "intensive mothering," which decrees that "children are perceived as precious, innocent and priceless little beings who are in need of constant care and attention" (Hays 1996, p. 112).

The perceived negative impact of having children on freedom and time was the second-most cited factor ( $f=8$ ) that influenced them to be childless. Differentiating the responses by highest education attained, we found that this reason was equally cited by both higher- ( $f_H=4$ ) and lower-skilled ( $f_L=4$ ) respondents. This factor can be said to be equally critical to both groups of women and it was not swayed by their level of education.

## Burden of High Financial Costs

The high monetary costs of bearing and raising children were cited by seven childless respondents as a significant factor associated with avoiding motherhood:

Even before the baby is born, already have to start paying, for pregnancy check-ups, then diapers, milk powder, baby cot. Babies are really quite expensive. (H2)

The cost of raising a kid in Singapore is just too high... the delivery (of the baby) is just one part, ... school books, tuition fees and don't know what other extra classes also; ballet lah, piano, swimming. All these need money. (L8)

The perception of an investment of an inordinate amount of finances during childrearing also seems to be a result of an internalization, yet, ironically, also a rejection of an ideology which advocates the “importance of assuring proper cognitive and psychological development in children ... and urges parents to buy the right toys, provide the right learning experiences, take the child on special child-centered outings and vacations, (and) offer the child enrichment classes” (Hays 1996, p. 121).

Seven respondents indicated a desire to have children but they reasoned that the lack of financial resources prevented them from doing so. These grievances about high financial commitment were a manifestation of the women’s internal dialogues in relation to their perceptions of their husbands. As one respondent lamented:

Who don’t want to have children if they can...? I also want. But we don’t even have enough money for ourselves, so many bills to pay, and need to give money to parents. So no choice lor, cannot have children in this lifetime already. (L7)

The above respondent’s lamentation confirms Coleman’s (1998, p. 9) argumentation that the social problem of childlessness in Singapore is created by a significant gap between ideals (wanting to have children) and realities (not being able to have children due to high financial costs).

High financial costs as a hindrance to having children ranked third in the sample’s cited reasons ( $f=7$ ) explaining the childlessness decision. Out of the seven respondents who cited this factor, six of them were from the lower-skilled segment. Financial costs as a main deterrent seems to be neglected in the existing literature on the subject, but is a genuine and very significant concern among our lower-skilled respondents.

### **Division of Labor at Home Remains Traditional**

The reason why five respondents chose to remain childless was associated with the perception that the division of labor at home (household chores and childcare responsibilities) will continue to remain traditional despite them having a child and being in employment:

If I have kids, I will be the one looking after them. Maybe my husband will help out too but will it be enough? Like now, he doesn’t really help to keep the house clean or cook. I think, ultimately, it’s (caring for the children) just gonna be my responsibility. (L5)

From the quote above, it can be seen that our respondent’s (and many other respondents’ as well) emphasis was on her career, rather than on the home or children. She rejected the traditional gender ideology where the role of the husband is to work and provide; and the role of the wife is in home-making and childrearing (Finley 1986). Of course, the reality of her husband not doing housework continues, with or without a child.

Despite having modern, egalitarian mindsets about having women in the workforce and earning money alongside their husbands, our respondents seemed to have also, ironically, internalized the traditional gender roles that females are still held to be in charge of the home. While social values about women’s roles have changed to include women in the public realm of work, our respondents perceived that gender role ideology in the home remains traditional. The entry of women into the work world does not diminish their traditional role as home-maker and child-caregiver. To women in Singapore, the divide between the public and the private is sharp, even brutal. Despite both spouses working, our respondents realized that the bulk of housework and childcare will fall on their shoulders:

Holding my current job now is already tiring enough... Imagine if I have children, I will have to look after them when I get home (from work), it’s going to be like having two jobs, one at work, then another at home. (H1)

The idea of bearing children while working did not bode well with our respondents. These women knew that they continue to bear the primary responsibilities at home, doing the “second shift” (Hochschild 1989) after their first shift at work. Men come home to relax and enjoy themselves while women have to provide “husband care,” which suggests women have less leisure hours than men (Hochschild 1997). Our respondents predicted, rightly, that this condition will worsen when a child is born. Child care and husband care would create the condition of a “captive

wife,” where the escape route is blocked. A mother in Singapore is a lonely mother who does mothering alone. But will her extended family help? We will answer this question later.

## Negotiating Employment Condition

Within the context of the workplace, our respondents had several salient concerns that they thought would compromise their current status in the office in the event that they choose to have a child.

### Incompatibility of Career and Motherhood

A significant concern that surfaced with regards to the workplace was the perception of the incongruity of career and motherhood. The women saw the worlds of remunerative work and reproduction as largely incompatible. Wishing to be continually engaged in full-time employment was the strongest reason for their decision not to have children. Our respondents tended to perceive motherhood and career as two mutually exclusive roles, and decided thus that work was “incompatible with a successful occupational career” (Veevers 1980, p. 50), a view held by ten out of 16 of our respondents:

I don't want to have to split my time between my baby and my career and at the end of the day, do badly for both. The baby will require so much of my time and energy, to feed (and) change it (diapers), especially in the early formation years. I would want to be a great mum but still be an excellent worker. (H7)

The women reasoned that if they had to simultaneously juggle both roles (as a career woman and mother), they were not confident that they could give children the best care, especially when career mattered a lot to them. One respondent expressed a “desire to give other things priority” in her life (Carmichael and Whittaker 2007, p. 114).

The incompatibility of career and motherhood was the most commonly cited reason for voluntary childlessness ( $f=10$ ). Dissecting this bivariate relationship further by highest educational

attainment, seven out of ten of the women who cited this reason were higher-skilled. The skewed nature of this finding revealed that these women, more than the lower-skilled ones, perceived the two spheres of remunerative work and family life as distinct and separate. This finding of ours went beyond Finley's (1986) research, which noted how the two distinct and separate spheres of public and private life are assigned to males and females. Instead of conforming to the traditional gender norm of committing themselves to homemaking and reproduction, these highly-skilled women had chosen to excel in the work world and give up on the childbearing role.

### Opportunity Costs

Besides the financial costs, having children will also pose other hindrances. Opportunity costs refer to “the best alternative that is forgone because a particular course of action is pursued” (Wall Street Words 2010). In this case the particular course of action is having a child, while the opportunity that has been forgone would be the remunerative salary, whether from maternity leave or from dropping out of the workforce altogether—or a secure job advancement trajectory. Six women clearly pinpointed the high opportunity costs that would have to be forgone if they were to bear a child:

When you get pregnant, you have to take leave to see the doctor and when the child is born, take yet more leave to recover and look after the baby. (H1)

My job is important to me. It is my career. I have spent the last 10 years to get where I am now. If I have children, I will need to give it all up. And when I return to work (after the maternity leave), I will not be treated the same. Will my boss still see me as capable and focused? Or dedicated to the family? I (won't) be slated for promotion or bonuses anymore. Is that worth the sacrifice? No (she shook her head). (H3)

These women's choice accord with Wax's observation that there is a “mommy track” (2004, p. 37) for employees who choose a path of work that is more compatible with family life. Women are punished at work for also being a good mother at home. This results in a fall into second-class work status, which will greatly affect their chance for job advancement.

Another opportunity cost that might be forgone if one were to become a stay-home mother is the investment (of money, time, and effort) that has been made in obtaining their academic qualifications thus far and the potential rewards that this education will earn for the women in the future:

It is such a waste to spend so much money, and 15 over years of your studying away, and then quitting your job soon after just to have kids. What's the point of getting a good degree and a good job if you're just going to be a housewife in the end? I cannot imagine staying home all day just to look after children and to cook and clean. It will be so boring! It's definitely not for me (H5)

This respondent of ours perceived being a stay-home mother as “boring.” She reasoned that choosing to be a housewife (to look after children, cook, and clean the house) will not do justice to the hard work, financial costs, accomplishments of a university education, and then landing a satisfying job. All these potential opportunities will be wasted if one chooses the path of motherhood or, in particular, being a housewife. This was a surprising finding to us.

High opportunity costs to be forgone was a commonly cited reason ( $f=6$ ) for not wanting to have children. Bringing in the variable of education level to the equation, the higher- and lower-skilled women were once again divided. Five out of six of the respondents who had cited this reason as significant to them were among the higher-skilled.

### Reasoning Childlessness with Extended Families

Being daughters and daughters-in-laws, our respondents went through complicated reasoning processes to justify their childlessness decision to their extended family.

### Lack of Reliable Help

As our respondents did not live with either side's parents or extended family, the lack of readily available and reliable help in child care, should they decide to have children, was another reason cited:

We moved out to our own flat soon after we got married... more space and privacy. It's quite difficult to have a child when there's no one to (help to) look after. Maids are so expensive! And nowadays they also seem to be very problematic lah. Grandparents are supposed to be the best caregivers to the kids but we don't live with them anymore. (L2)

The lack of help from the extended family, especially from grandparents, contributed to our respondents' intention to remain childless. Their distrust in foreign domestic workers<sup>7</sup> eliminated a possible source of early childhood care. The distrust in maids (who are deemed “expensive” and “problematic”) stemmed from the women's anxiety with a stranger taking care of their (vulnerable) loved ones.

The lack of dependable help to working women had deterred three respondents from being mothers, all of whom belonged to the lower-skilled group. This lack of early childcare support is partly due to the unaffordability of childcare services, and is closely linked to the perceived high financial costs of having children. During the interviews, we heard their grievances about the high costs of daycare centers or nanny arrangements for young children. This reiterates the argument that our lower-skilled respondents hinged their anti-natalistic decisions on the perceived high costs of raising a child in Singapore.

The above findings can be understood in the context of Pereira's (2006) study of Singapore. He showed that at an aggregate level, most Singaporeans still strongly value the institutions of marriage and family and are “generally pro-children” (Pereira 2006, p. 17). Ideally, Singaporeans place emphasis on marriage and parenthood. However, due to the high costs of childbearing and rearing, Singaporeans are unable to realize those goals. As it happens, there is a significant disparity between the “ideals and reality in society,” creating one of Singapore's “social problems” (Coleman quoted in Pereira 2006, p. 81).

<sup>7</sup>These paid foreign domestic helpers are, in local terms, referred to as “maids.” These women are typically from neighboring countries of the Philippines or Indonesia, and come to Singapore as live-in helpers who aid in the domestic chores of the family, in particular, cleaning, childrearing, and taking care of the elderly.

## Negotiating with Singapore Society

Singapore society is an important but controversial context in which the women needed to position their childlessness decision. The societal context is different from the network of extended family, as the former engenders women's perceptions of society's expectations of what mothering entails or how children are valued.

## Fear of Long-Term Commitment and Responsibility

Two women noted that having children is not a "one-time thing" that stops at childbearing, but rather a long-time, even life-long, commitment and responsibility. The role of motherhood is for ever as it cannot be relinquished once it is taken up. There is no turning back. One woman exclaimed:

Yes, the thought of giving birth scares me, but just thinking about how much time and money and energy that have to go into caring for the child is even worse. And I have to be responsible for the child for at least 21 years, maybe even more! It is not just a one-time thing to worry about. (H8)

As Brewster and Rindfuss (2000, p. 273) argued, the fall in fertility rates is due to an apprehension toward childrearing, the process of raising a child, rather than childbearing, the act of giving birth *per se*. Children are for life. One can call someone an ex-husband or an ex-wife, but one cannot (or, usually does not and ought not) call anyone an ex-son, ex-daughter, ex-mother, ex-father, ex-sister, ex-brother, and so on.

## Loss of Attractiveness

Another two childless respondents had observed (through stories from family or friends or through personal observations and anecdotes) how full-time motherhood can affect negatively one's appearance or attractiveness, and this had influenced or reinforced their decision to remain childless. The women were concerned that their intellectual capabilities and attractiveness may be

diminished by being a mother, especially a stay-home mother. Superficially, the loss of physical attractiveness referred to the loss of one's figure, or being dowdy in appearance. But women also feared that their "standard of conversation" would diminish with having children and staying at home all day, such as in not being kept abreast of current affairs:

In the malls... the mothers (tugging their kids) all look so tired and haggard. It's not so much about being fat, though that's a concern for me too, but rather how they dress and behave, so dowdy-looking. I don't want to look like them. (L1)

My good friend used to be quite "a somebody" in the banking scene too. But after she had kids and quit her job, she's no longer the same. Now all she talks about are her kids and their school stuff. When the rest (the other people in the conversation) talk about current affairs, like shares and the stock market or world news, she has totally no idea. She's just not up-to-date anymore and it can be quite embarrassing. (H4)

A stay-home mother has become an unattractive, unsociable, undesirable woman—or so did our respondents fear.

## Children Are Unnecessary

A minority of two respondents found children unattractive. One said:

To put it simply, I just do not like children. They are noisy and demanding. I know people think babies are cute, but I just don't see the charm in them. (H5)

This respondent seemed to echo the fraction of females in Carmichael and Whittaker's (2007, p. 114) research on women who "from an early age had rejected motherhood." Respondents who viewed children as unnecessary were aware that there is a prevalent social norm and expectation for married couples to have children. However, our respondent was satisfied with the status quo and did not feel the desire or need to alter it. Another respondent explained:

We (my husband and I) are very happy like this, still feel like we are dating. No need to worry about rushing home or what. Why do we need to have children anyway? Just to conform to societal expectations? What matters most is that we're happy like this now. (H4)



This is in direct contrast to Pereira's (2006, p. 17) observation about Singaporeans being "generally pro-children." This finding of ours confirms Taussig's (1997, p. 171) claim that "individualism is at the root of the phenomenon" of voluntary childlessness in contemporary society, which is characterized by "more freedom of opportunity, more spur to individual ambition, more stirring from education and from the consciousness of larger possibilities."

Two respondents had indicated their preference for maintaining their current lifestyle and they did not view children as necessary or desirable to their marriage. As expected, they belonged to the higher-skilled group. They displayed the individualistic mindset that Taussig (1997) asserted to be the root cause of increasing childlessness in contemporary society.

### Fear of Inadequacy as Mother

The fear of being an inadequate or incapable mother was expressed by only one respondent, a highly skilled professional woman. This childless working wife perceived parenthood to be no

easy task and having problematic or unmanageable children as a real possibility:

Kids these days are difficult to raise; I hear many cases of gang fights and teenage pregnancies, it is so scary how they turn out. What do I do if my kid turned out like that? (H6)

### The Significance of Occupational Skills and Educational Attainment

As shown in Table 13.4, we found a wide disparity in the factors influencing the childlessness choice of higher- versus lower-skilled respondents.

The most often cited reason for not having children, as noted previously, was the incompatibility of career and motherhood ( $f=10$ ), followed by the curtailing of freedom and time ( $f=8$ ) and the burden of high financial costs ( $f=7$ ). Two broad categories subsumed the most frequently cited reasons for voluntary childlessness: the women's perception of spousal relations ( $f=20$ ) and negotiating employment ( $f=16$ ). These two broad categories of reasons made up the lion's share of reasons given, indicating their importance to these women when the question of

**Table 13.4** Factors influencing voluntary childlessness among higher-skilled and lower-skilled

Factors influencing voluntary childlessness		$f^a$	$f_H^b$	$f_L^c$
<i>Perceptions of Spousal Relations</i>		20	7	13
1	Curtailing of freedom and time	8	4	4
2	Burden of high financial costs	7	1	6
3	Division of labor at home remains traditional	5	2	3
<i>Negotiating Employment Condition</i>		16	12	4
4	Incompatibility of career and motherhood	10	7	3
5	Opportunity costs	6	5	1
<i>Reasoning Childlessness Choice with Extended Families</i>		3	0	3
6	Lack of available and reliable help	3	0	3
<i>Negotiating with Singapore Society</i>		7	5	2
7	Fear of long-time commitment and responsibility	2	1	1
8	Loss of attractiveness	2	1	1
9	Children are unnecessary	2	2	0
10	Fear of inadequacy as mother	1	1	0
Total		46	24	22

<sup>a</sup> $f$ =total frequency of respondents who cited the particular factor

<sup>b</sup> $f_H$ =frequency of higher-skilled respondents who cited the particular factor

<sup>c</sup> $f_L$ =frequency of lower-skilled respondents who cited the particular factor

to be or not to be a mother came up. At the other end of the spectrum, the least frequently cited reasons for voluntary childlessness were in the categories of negotiating with Singapore society and extended family.

After factoring in the education and skill level of our respondents into the analysis, we noted that though the frequency of responses appeared to be evenly distributed between the two groups ( $f_H = 24$  and  $f_L = 22$ ), there was actually a wide disparity in the factors between higher- and lower-skilled respondents. Factors with regard to negotiating employment were cited more frequently by the higher-skilled respondents ( $f_H = 12$  vs.  $f_L = 4$ ). Of the ten respondents who mentioned incompatibility of career and motherhood as a significant factor, seven were higher-skilled. Of the six respondents who felt the opportunity costs (in terms of promotion and job trajectory) of having a baby were too great, only one was lower-skilled.

On the reverse, factors associated with perceptions of spousal relations were mentioned more frequently by the lower-skilled respondents ( $f_L = 13$ ). In particular, the high financial costs of childbearing and childrearing were deemed a considerable burden mostly by the lower-skilled women ( $f_L = 6$ ).

Compared to the higher-skilled respondents ( $f_H = 7$ ), the lower-skilled group ( $f_L = 16$ ) also seemed to regard social relations (both spousal and extended families) to be more significant in influencing their childlessness decision. The higher-skilled respondents drew tighter associations with factors affecting their employment and negotiations with Singapore society.

## Conclusion

Our study of the 16 voluntarily childless Chinese-Singaporean women yielded two key findings. Firstly, although the reasons given by these women for their intention to remain childless were many and varied, the perceived irreconcilability of career and motherhood was a recurring theme and a dominant factor in the women's reasoning. This reason was given by ten women,

namely, seven higher-skilled and three lower-skilled women.

The second most often mentioned reason justifying the voluntary childlessness decision was that having children would curtail freedom and time and prevented one from doing other desired activities. This factor was strong among both the higher-skilled and the lower-skilled women, and was closely related to the women's justification not to have children because of opportunity costs, combining perceived costs in spousal life and working life.

The burden of high financial costs was mentioned by seven women. One was higher-skilled but six were lower-skilled. For the lower-skilled women, this factor was clearly interrelated with their perceived ability, or inability, to negotiate employment, namely, a higher post and gaining a higher salary. The lack of access to reliable help from their husbands and extended families contributed to our sample women's assessment that childrearing is too costly in Singapore. This fear of having to shoulder the bulk of childrearing in a society that would not provide much support was also evident in the responses of the two women who did not wish to have children because they could not commit the time and responsibility.

Our findings do not support the views of Lee (2008) and Chan (2010) that women delay childbearing because they want to create more ideal conditions first. Their assessment of their husbands, work, extended family help, and Singapore society determined their decisions. Such awaiting for ideal conditions also do not seem relevant to women who think that, at least for themselves, their marriages and their relations with extended family, having children is not a must, nor necessary.

The fear of being an inadequate mother hardly figured in our data, only mentioned by one respondent, which clearly indicates that societal condition, rather than the ideology of perfect mothering, prevented the women from having children.

The childlessness intentions were different according to the educational level of the respondents, except that women from both groups were equally concerned about the curtailing of freedom and time if they had children. Yet while the higher-skilled group exercised preference towards

career or spontaneity and possessed greater autonomy to choose childlessness, the lower-skilled group can be said to be prevented from motherhood due largely to financial hardships. An understanding of these differences in economic, material terms contributes to the current literature and will help policymakers to design pro-natalistic policies that might better cater to, even entice, the two different groups in a small niche community. If tangible and effective measures are not promptly implemented to make Singapore more baby-friendly, the childfree way of voluntary childlessness may gain increasing popularity as an attractive alternative lifestyle.

Presently, there is an emphasis in the media in Singapore, including television commercials, radio broadcasts, and bus panels (Wong and Yeoh 2003, p. 12) on building a “supportive physical environment for our families,” such as nursing rooms, pram and child buggy rental facilities, as well as child-friendly toilets (Building and Construction Authority 2002)—all in an attempt to depict Singapore as a pro-family society. These means, however, are only applicable to and are utilized by the “converted” parents. They do not encourage married childless couples to procreate either. These actions do not address the factors (employment and procreation as incompatible and the financial costs) that our respondents mentioned as their main impetus for not reproducing. Thus, the pro-family campaigns need to be more aggressive and innovative, perhaps by using more effective channels such as the internet and movie trailers to reach out to the intended recipients of the message—working, childless couples. Husbands need to be encouraged to play an active role in childbearing and childrearing.

To help career-minded female employees to resolve their work–family dilemmas, more family-friendly policies need to be implemented in the workplace. Not only do formal national or corporate policies (e.g., maternity leave, childcare sick leave) play a part, the corporate culture of the company has a large impact too. If employees perceive that having children and desiring a more family-friendly work pace may jeopardize her position in the office, she may reject the motherhood role altogether.

There were a few respondents in our sample, especially those lower-skilled ones, who would like to have children, but required more financial help in translating their ideals into reality. In order to address this “social problem” that couples face and to reverse the country’s declining birth rate, just as Pereira (2006) suggested, the state should focus on pro-family campaigns. Monetary incentives are useful and needed but a pure fiscal approach is not enough to attract childless couples to procreate. In addition, we propose that the current baby bonus scheme needs to be revised. A more comprehensive scheme is required, especially one that addresses the lack of affordable and convenient early childhood care arrangements. Not only are there insufficient childcare options for parents to choose from, the present available avenues are expensive also. The average monthly going rate of full-day childcare and infant care center is S\$793 (Ministry of Community Development and Youth and Sports 2010, p. 1). Relative to the average monthly income (S\$2,350) of our lower-skilled respondents, the costs of full-day childcare alone would take up roughly 33.7% of the working wife’s income. Currently, the monthly government subsidy per child for approved center-based childcare is a maximum of S\$300, not even covering half of the fees. An improved baby bonus scheme will be more effective in attracting dual-income, financially tight couples to take up parenthood. The coverage of affordable early childhood arrangements will give them peace of mind as they contribute to the economy.

In order to reverse the low fertility trend and encourage more births, the state also needs to alter the mindsets of the higher-skilled women by emphasizing the desirability of having a child and down-playing the lost opportunities while, at the same time, granting greater fiscal incentives and providing affordable early childcare arrangements to attract lower-skilled citizens who desire children but are stopped by economic concerns.

Marshall’s (1993, p. 12) definition of being voluntarily childless is problematic. Even though all our respondents were, at the time of the interview, legally married, childless, fertile, and self-defined as not ever wanting children, most of

them were not completely past the childbearing age nor were they sterilized. Their childlessness may perhaps only be a temporary condition, and not a permanent or irrevocable one. This means that the option to conceive is still open to them if they one day decide to have children. However, given the present circumstances, all of our respondents told us that they do not *ever* want to have children.

As there exists a possibility (and probability) of respondents changing their minds later in life, especially when the government's public campaigns manage to help some women to "turn the corner," longitudinal cohort studies may prove useful in examining the permanence (or its lack) of their childlessness intention and the circumstances under which decisions are maintained or altered.

Our research focused solely on Chinese wives, thus neglecting ethnicity and religion as plausible factors affecting one's decision making. Many of the respondents' decision not to have children were not recently made; our respondents gave their reasons in retrospect. Their reasoning might have changed several times over the years, possibly fluctuating between pro- and anti-procreation positions. To be or not to be, that was (and for some, still is and will be) the question.

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## Fertility Transition and the Transformation of Working Class Family Life in Urban China in the 1960s

Wang Danning

Detailed evaluations of demographic data have confirmed that urban China experienced an early fertility transition in the 1960s, when the state's family planning policy had just been launched but when it was not yet being strictly enforced. Compared to the fertility transition that occurred in rural China, this urban transition came a decade earlier and took a shorter period of time for fertility to reach replacement level. By the late 1970s, when the state launched its one-child policy, rural China still had a total fertility rate higher than 3, but the dramatic fertility transition in urban China was already virtually over. The 1960s became the breaking point for China's urban fertility transition (Banister 1987).

In the limited number of social science studies that have examined this urban fertility transition, scholars have adopted two different positions in explaining the phenomenon. One group argues that the social and cultural changes that had arisen since 1949 created a historical background for this transition, making it the predictable and inevitable result of a more far-reaching and generalized modernization process (Whyte and Parish 1984). The other group argues that "the factors most responsible for the overall pattern of fertility change since 1949 have been fundamentally political" (Pasternak 1986, p. 67). Correspondingly, scholars on both sides of this argument have also

provided differing explanations for the fertility rebound that occurred between 1967 and 1968. During this rebound, Tianjin's total fertility rate rose from 2.8 to 3.6 (Banister 1987). The most frequently cited explanation for this upsurge is that, during the Cultural Revolution, the state's administrative network was paralyzed and less able to effectively direct family planning programs and distribute birth control devices. This argument dovetails with the hypothesis that the early fertility decline in urban China in the 1960s was a direct result of the state's effective implementation of its birth control policy; once the administrative system that was so effective at reducing urban reproduction was paralyzed during the Cultural Revolution, fertility rebounded (Pasternak 1986; Wolf 1986; Peng 1989, 1991).

However, examination of data at the local level does not support this explanation. Even given the tight social control that the government exercised over urban Chinese, human reproduction cannot be explained only from the perspective of state power. Negotiation with one's community and family, individual compromise, and constant re-evaluation of relative advantages and disadvantages continually determine and redetermine people's fertility behaviors. Urban residents assess their daily lives and consider numerous social conditions before formulating their decisions regarding reproduction accordingly. Demographer A.J. Coale once postulated that fertility transitions only occur when populations are simultaneously "ready, willing, and able." "Readiness" refers to the economic advantage to

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be gained at the household or individual level which motivates fertility control. “Willingness” encompasses the moral acceptability or the legitimization of such action. “Ability” refers to the availability and acceptability of methods of birth control (Coale 1973). According to this multifaceted fertility transition model, the urban fertility transition of the 1960s can be explained effectively and comprehensively only through a synthesis of socioeconomic, political and cultural changes prior to the 1960s that paved the way for a “ready, willing, and able” urban Chinese population to engage in new demographic behaviors. Once we have defined the conditions that motivated urban Chinese to make certain reproductive decisions and enabled them to translate those decisions into action, we will need to determine what part of that macro framework changed such that fertility levels rebounded in 1967–1968.

The active correlation between family decisions about family size and existing socioeconomic conditions is a familiar phenomenon in China, and it was not new or unique to urban Chinese in the 1960s. For example, the advantages and disadvantages that accompany membership in a large joint family are constantly weighed and assessed by individuals who belong to such family groups. On the one hand, common economic interests can pool family labor, capital, and resources together for mutual advantage. On the other hand, suspicion of one another’s motivations and disagreements over the distribution of the products of joint labor can catalyze family division, sometimes at the cost of challenging cultural expectations. Facing multiple constraints, individual members frame and plan their strategies within the family. Their decisions directly affect the productivity of the joint phase of the family cycle, as well as its length (Cohen 1976; Pasternak 1983; Wolf 1985; Harrell 1993). In nuclear families, decisions about family size and children’s sex are keyed to various socioeconomic and political constraints. Deliberate birth control methods existed in high-fertility regimes in urban China before the implementation of coercive state policies. Family members actively applied various culturally justified tools to control family size and determine sexual composition of offspring in

order to meet the challenge of multiple social and economic constraints (Zhao 1997).

Since the early 1950s, concomitant with the rise of Chinese socialism, a series of structural constraints emerged as the state developed strategies to deal with the massive pressure of the urban population growth that was generated by the internal contradiction between state-controlled industrialization and the increasing social and economic costs of massive urbanization that arose as a result of the state’s adoption of a Stalinist industrialization model. Urban family living standards directly correlated with family size and were sensitive to the social and economic pressures that resulted from the implementation of salary freezes, a state-controlled employment system, restrictions on standards of consumption, and local scrutiny by the state. In order to maintain a decent and respectable family life, working class families prioritized family size as an issue and made internal compromises with respect to their goal of achieving a “perfect” family composition in making decisions about reproduction. What this chapter addresses is how the state’s encompassing control over female urbanites’ public and private lives transformed their daily management of family income and consumption, which ultimately catalyzed families’ adoption of contraception. It shows that the urban fertility transition in the 1960s was not the direct result of the state’s birth planning campaign, nor was it a straightforward outcome of industrialization and the urbanization process as is argued of western societies. Instead, it was the product of the culturally justified reaction of individual families to a series of structural constraints that emerged in the wake of socialist urban management. The fertility rebound of the late 1960s can be seen as a logical consequence of the temporary release of certain structural constraints during the Cultural Revolution.

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## Field Site and Research Methods

Between 1996 and 1997, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a working class neighborhood, Xinshuli, in Tianjin to investigate the

socioeconomic and political factors behind the early fertility decline in urban China. Located in the center of the industrial Hebei District, Xinshuli is connected to Xinfeng Factory, a state-owned engine-manufacturing enterprise, and has served as one of the factory's dormitories for more than 50 years. The neighborhood had 513 households with a total population of 1,909 in 1996. As a state-owned enterprise (SOE), Xinfeng Factory owned the housing property in Xinshuli and had the sole right to construct and distribute dormitory houses among its employees. By 1985, 57.1% of Tianjin's property arrangements were set up along the same pattern as those of Xinfeng Factory and Xinshuli, belonging to SOEs, the military, or the central government's local offices. Because of their higher administrative status, these state institutions and agencies were not under municipal control and could manage their property directly (Overall Annuals of Tianjin: 932). The physical and managerial attachment of the neighborhood to the factory allowed me to observe the local dynamic within one of the tightest state/society relationships and to test the effectiveness of the state's implementation of its policies in urban centers.

My research focused on the working class population and was designed to gain an understanding of the reaction of the majority of the population to the state's family planning programs. Historical archives showed that the state's efforts to promote birth control between 1962 and 1964 were only in their initial stages and no penalties were ever implemented at the local level. The real effect of publicly disseminating information on contraception and distributing birth control devices remained unexamined.

Meanwhile, the "general modernization" explanation emphasizes the impact of a stable socialist urban economy, universal medical services to urban residents, the new marriage law—which raised the legal marriage age and resulted in, women's increased participation in the labor force and the concomitant increase in their education levels. In other words, those who attribute the fertility decline of the 1960s to a larger modernization process contend that it follows the pattern of general industrialization as

exemplified by western culture, even though the urban Chinese economy was socialist, not capitalist. What remains unclear is how the socialist urban economy created local mechanisms to regulate labor forces in order to make possible a transition of the existing paradigm of reproduction. Additionally, what happened to traditional Chinese pro-natal culture? By designing an ethnographic research focusing on the working class population, rather than the middle class, I intended to examine how the process of socialist industrialization and urbanization transformed mass culture at the local community level.

My one-year research project was conducted in three phases. At the municipal level, I worked with the Tianjin Social Science Institute, Tianjin Daily, and Tianjin Population Research Center to collect Tianjin demographic, historical, and political economic data. I also worked with the Tianjin Library to conduct a media analysis of public discourse in the 1950s and 1960s. In the factory, I interviewed senior administrators, labor union cadres, female worker representatives, and factory librarians to understand the factory's history during the past 50 years. I also obtained a copy of the factory's history which helped me to review the development of the factory before and after 1949. At the community level, I conducted in-depth interviews with 30 retired women in the neighborhood with the aim of collecting their recollections of their families' histories from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Seventeen of these women worked in Xinfeng Factory in the 1960s as full-time employees; the other 13 married Xinfeng employees and had no formal employment record in the 1960s. They either relied on part-time jobs or worked as manual laborers to earn extra income for their families. All of the informants were identified by the neighborhood committee and the interviews were conducted either in the neighborhood committee office or in the women's homes. Their husbands, daughters, sons, and grandchildren were included in the interviews whenever possible. In addition to these in-depth interviews, I also engaged in numerous conversations, dialogues, and chats with local residents during my stay. Due to the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, the interviews were not tape-recorded.

I relied entirely on the interviewees' memories to reconstruct their reproductive history in the 1960s and to conduct my subsequent analysis. In theory, there was a danger that the interviewees could rely on their current social, cultural, and economic contexts and patterns of thinking to explain their everyday habits and behavioral norms in the past. I addressed this potential risk by implementing three safeguards in my methodological design in order to dissuade my subjects from engaging in any imaginative flights, idealizations, or rationalizations in the course of their recollections. First, all interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured survey to collect basic family information from the 1950s and 1960s. Three sections of the survey were specifically designed to ensure that the data were viable and that the interviewees' recollections were accurate. In the reproductive history section, the birthdays of the interviewees' offspring were recorded both as calendar dates and using the Chinese zodiac system. It turned out that the Chinese zodiac system was more reliable than the calendar dates. Through other local sources of statistics and data, children's birthdays could also be cross-checked against school years, school grades, and the dates that the offspring went to the countryside. Any gap longer than a year between births in a family suggested that I should further question to identify potential stillbirths, infant mortality, or abortions. In the section on family economy, I collected detailed data on the family's monthly income and expenses. Amazingly, due to the state's stringent compensation and consumption controls, which included salary freezes and a zero inflation rate, all of my informants remembered clearly, even after 30 years, their monthly income and the prices of grain, fruit, meat, utilities, and rent. What would have constituted a much harder task in a western-oriented research project became, in fact, the easiest part of my research in socialist China in the 1960s. In collecting data regarding my informants' daily schedules, I requested detailed information regarding transportation schedules, workloads, breast-feeding times, after-work activities, and household chore management. This allowed me to understand the impact of my

informants' reproductive lives on their work and vice versa.

Second, after 40 years of living and working closely together, the neighbors knew each other's family lives intimately. Interviewees constantly cross-checked each other's information and verified and corrected the details of one another's reproductive history. The boundaries between the public and the private were frequently traversed and these porous boundaries deepened my understanding of my informants' past and present lives.

Third, major events in the informants' factories and neighborhoods that occurred in the 1960s were used to cross-check various people's reactions and their attitudes towards family size. Giving birth to a child was treated not just as a family matter, but also as a social event that affected family members' attitudes towards work, participation in collective activities, and political campaigns. Numerous social and political campaigns took place in Tianjin in the 1960s. The state and the factory relied on these programs to mobilize the masses. After 30 years, the theme of each campaign might no longer be important to these women, but they still vividly recollected the pain and frustration of the double burdens that they were forced to carry during those days of political turmoil. My historical and archival research and analysis of factory history provided a local context within which to examine their activities, feelings, and decision-making processes. Through this combination of data related to macro and micro levels of social events and family issues, I was able to collect reliable data.

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### **Ready: The Impact of Wage Austerity and the Consumption Control**

The repression of urban compensation and consumption, as a theme of de-urbanization, was an element of the centrally controlled Stalinist development model. To maintain a long-term development plan and maximize investment capital accumulated from both agricultural and industrial production, the state needed to incorporate urbanites' compensation and consumption into its comprehensive economic plan and

minimize the costs of industrialization. Even before individual families, the state was the first to feel the massive pressure of urban population growth and, in response, devised a series of strategies to deal with it in the 1950s and 1960s. These strategies formed the socioeconomic and political background against which working class families made their living on a daily basis. This series of compensation and consumption policies implemented by the state made the nuclear family highly sensitive to the relationship between family size and family income and consumption, creating an economic advantage to smaller family size at the household level that in turn motivated families to implement fertility control.

### Urban Compensation Control

Centrally controlled urban compensation was implemented through a set of standard wage ranks for different jobs and corresponding monthly wage payments supplemented by a “regional price subsidy” to reflect regional economic differences.<sup>1</sup> In this standardized wage system, established in 1956, there were eight ranks for industrial workers. Each worker employed in a state enterprise or collective factory was ranked on the scale according to technical skill, education, and seniority, and received corresponding monthly wage payments. Between 1956 and 1958, both piece-rate (*jijian gongzi* 計件工資) and bonus (*jinagjin* 獎金) systems were used as incentives in factories. However, the flexibility and differentiation in the compensation system created by the piece-rate and bonus systems were eliminated during the Great Leap Forward. The subsequent economic collapse during the big famine further contributed to the freeze of the national wage system until 1963 when the economic recovery was underway. In

1963, there was a nationwide urban wage adjustment. Workers of all ranks received promotions and wage increases. Piece rates and bonuses were reintroduced in factories in order to induce high productivity (Korzec and Whyte 1981).

Two years after this compensation adjustment, in 1965, however, the state intensified its central control and froze the wage system again. While the momentum of the Cultural Revolution was building up and the state’s heavy investment in the “Third Front” was increasing, the political attack on the material lifestyle of the urban centers was emerging. In advocating egalitarianism in urban life, the Cultural Revolution targeted the urban wage system for fundamental reform. In factories, piece rates and bonuses were eliminated once again. There was no salary increase for the next 12 years, except for a small-scale adjustment in 1971 (Korzec and Whyte 1981). This long period of wage freezes (1965–1977) cast a dark shadow upon urban working class family life, especially those young workers who began working in the late 1950s at the lowest ranks and received the lowest payments in the 1960s when they were organizing their nuclear families and becoming parents.

### Urban Consumption Control

Compared to control of urban compensation, official control over urban consumption was a far more complicated and difficult task. It was achieved mainly by transforming the state into the dominant distributor of agricultural and industrial products as well as of social services for urban residents. Unified distribution channels for agricultural and industrial products did allow the state to reserve a large surplus, as well as set aside profits for investments in heavy industry. However, this strategy drastically damaged urban market networks and diminished the colorful and heterogeneous local life of urban China in all its aspects. Additionally, collective management had little ability to regulate and change urban residents’ consumptive interests, appetites, and tastes. The state, therefore, initiated a campaign to direct urban consumption. The state consistently

<sup>1</sup>The best description of the Chinese wage system is Christopher Howe’s *Wage Patterns and Wage Policy in Modern China 1919–1972*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973; and Michel Korzec and Martin K. Whyte’s “Reading Notes: The Chinese Wage System,” in *China Quarterly*, vol. 86, pp. 248–273.



advocated savings, thrift, and economy in urban consumption.

The theme of repressing domestic consumption and the advocacy of tight and uplifted family life lasted for more than two decades and was replaced by consumer-driven advocacy after Deng's economic reform in 1978. Compared to other political and ideological social movements in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, this campaign has been ignored by most scholars of Chinese studies not only because it was mainly about trivial household chores, but also because of its persistence with little fluctuation for three decades. However, from the local perspective, it was this campaign and its political economic background that added a new layer of social constraint by installing a new set of social standards within the local community. It not only created a material relationship between the state and the family, but also formulated new criteria for acceptable citizenship based on domestic behaviors.

The cohort that enrolled in the labor force during the Great Leap Forward began at the bottom of the national pay scales, and most of them did not accumulate sufficient skill and experience to earn promotion during the payroll adjustment in 1964. Any opportunities they might have had for further raises were completely eliminated by the wage freeze that lasted from 1965 to 1977. Of any cohort that came of age between 1957 and 1977, this cohort suffered the most from the state-imposed waged austerity when they approached childbearing age because they were forced to raise growing families within a fixed income (Walder 1986; Whyte and Parish 1984).

### **Willing: Moral Acceptability and Legitimization for Family Control**

The economic difficulties of raising large families were further consolidated by the unreliable subsidy system in each workplace. In the 1960s, most urban couples still wanted to have both sons and daughters. Couples would have more children in order to have a son whenever they could find extra hands for housework and afford the economic expenses associated with a larger family.

However, when the couples' domestic economic burden went beyond control and they turned to the workplaces for financial support to subsidize their growing families, the result was social intolerance. The boundary between public and private had been transgressed as collective assets were utilized to meet the private interests of individual families. Frequent breastfeeding breaks, multiple maternal leaves, and shortened work days for mothers already jeopardized the hard work of other group members and damaged coworkers' collective interests. Individual reliance on state-sponsored financial programs further resulted in unequal access to collective assets and was publicly criticized and condemned. The local community discriminatorily labeled such conduct—i.e., having more and more children—as “eating the factory (*chi chang zi de* 吃廠子的)”—a selfish behavior that took advantage of the collective entity. Locally, the distinction between collective dependency on the factories' social benefits and individual reliance on the factory's financial subsidy system had been clearly drawn. To rely on the system for one's purely individual interests was taboo. Having too many children would not only bring economic strain, it also had the potential of being perceived as an act of “backwardness,” “a failure to make progress,” and “selfishness.” The distinction between collective dependency and individual reliance was effectively maintained by the mechanism of group assessment of financial applications. In searching for an effective way to eliminate such selfish conduct, group meetings in the workshops applied prevailing social standards to evaluate individual families' income, living standards, and consumption style.

According to official regulations, families under extreme economic hardship could apply financial aid from the factory. To be eligible for help from the Xinfeng Factory, a family had to bring in an average monthly household income of less than eight yuan per capita; family members' household registration status was also used to determine the amount of subsidy a family would receive. A family member with a rural registration status would receive the difference between his or her average monthly income and

10 yuan per month. For an urban resident, the level was lifted to 15 yuan per month. In other words, if a family of six had a total monthly income of less than 48 yuan and they all had urban household registrations, the family was eligible to receive an additional 42 yuan per month in financial subsidies to bring the total monthly income to 90 yuan.

Financial applications were reviewed on a monthly basis at shop floor group meetings and granted or rejected by cadres who also worked for the factory labor union. The public assessment was extremely humiliating to the applicants because most co-workers who participated in the group meetings were also neighbors and were familiar with each other's family lives. Compensated factory dorms were distributed among workers according to criteria that prioritized the timing of the application, family size, and length of employment. Families with different economic backgrounds lived next to each other in these dorms. Crowded living conditions and shared public areas constantly exposed the differentiation in families' daily lives to their neighbors. Neighbors shared public water pipes, latrines and cooking spaces, and socialized in the same public area. Neighbors knew each other's family income, family composition, daily schedule, and even cooking habits. Differentiation in domestic and socioeconomic conditions generated tensions during the group evaluations. Economic evaluation of the family's qualification for financial support directly addressed the family's consumption style and daily behaviors. State advocacy, cultural practice, and social norms formulated a code of public constraint for domestic behaviors. Private family life became as important as public work performance in the factories. "Extravagant" or "excessive" consumption style would not only lead to public criticism, but could also threaten families' eligibility for extra financial support from the state. Families with financial difficulties further lost their choice of consumption. In order to avoid the public assessment, families became cautious about behaviors that could be perceived as violating public standards and began to regulate themselves. One senior resident told me that she deliberately made two

new jackets for her husband that were exactly the same in color and style because she did not want her neighbors and coworkers to think that they were "spending too much" and showing off:

Back then quite[a] few families would spend money excessively (da shou da jiao 大手大腳). People would talk about that. Girls who just made new shirts for themselves wouldn't dare to wear them publicly. They would wear blue outfits to cover the new shirt and only had the shirt's collar shown.

Public assessment also had the power to determine the proper style and method of consumption. By exposing private habits and personal interests to the public, the group members could provide "collective" help to individual families to hinder their regular individual reliance on the factory.

One workshop cadre recalled:

Some families were not good at planning (bu hui guo 不會過) at all. One family ran out of their cloth ration in the summer and could not purchase cloth for tailoring summer clothes. They used their quilts' coversheet to make shorts and tops. What would they do in the winter?! Sleep under the quilt without a coversheet? We all went to help them. I gave some of my cloth vouchers to them.

In order to sustain private habits and preference, families were willing to give up financial support from the state. The women that I interviewed were specific about the distinction between collective dependence and individual reliance and emphasized their efforts to remain financially independent. They also emphasized the efforts that they made in their domestic management practices to fight against earning a negative image that could overshadow them for years. Families worked deliberately to avoid being perceived as leading an "extravagant" lifestyle by resisting any opportunity to engage in what would be perceived as excessive dining, recreation, or ostentatious display of wardrobe. Every month, families planned their spending carefully:

At the beginning of each month we received our salary, and we separated it in different piles (fen dui 分堆). Each pile was for one purpose. After that, there would not be much left. Our total monthly income was 103 yuan and for more than 10 years we received exactly the same amount every month. Not a penny less, not a penny more. Every month,

we sent 10 yuan to my parent-in-law; 30 yuan for kids' daycare; 15 yuan for rent and coal; about 30 yuan for food; and roughly 10 yuan to cover other necessities. We planned very carefully and knew little about consumption. By the way, there was not much time for shopping (*guang shang dian* 逛商店). If there was any spare money, we saved it for emergencies. When kids were sick, we needed extra money to cover the medical fees. Yes, the factory did reimburse the bills. But when it was at night, where to find money for hospital visits when the factory office was closed?

Son preference among the urban population still existed. Most couples still wanted to have at least one or two sons before concluding their reproductive lives. However, the continuous enlargement of family size and its social consequences also became important concerns that dissuaded some couples from trying to have more sons. Some activists stopped childbearing even though they had not yet had a son and instead turned their attention and resources to working in the factory and at home. Couples cooperated in their time management. In one case, after the couple's second daughter was born, the husband switched to the night shift so that he could stay at home during the day to take care of housework and the children while his wife worked in the factory. Grandparents also participated in the raising of the family's third generation and assisted with household chores. In another case, one female technician sent her two daughters back to Shanghai for six years to stay with her parent-in-laws so that she and her husband could focus on their work in the factory in Tianjin.

For the couples who waited till they had at least one son before they stopped having children, the additional housework and mounting costs associated with each additional child created an even heavier financial burden. Shuhua was an accountant who moved to Tianjin with her husband after he left his military position to work in the city as a cadre. They had three daughters and one son. After their son was born, the couple stopped childbearing. Suyun did not wait for her dream son. She had four daughters in six years and decided to stop in 1964 so that her family could manage to maintain a minimum living standard. Suyun had no job in the 1960s but she had a good relationship with her

husband and they both enjoyed life. Their humorous attitude and sunny personalities helped them to overcome the daily hardships that they faced. They called salt "sugar" and thus transformed a normal ingredient into a luxury item as a form of internal comfort. They also called sweet potatoes "meat" and enjoyed a "regular" consumption of such luxury foods. Suyun's husband loved to listen to Peking opera, and they managed to purchase a radio by cutting other daily expenses. However, their sunny attitudes and their consumption choices created controversy in the community. The couple deliberately avoided applying for financial aid from Xinfeng Factory and decided instead to control their family size.

Single-employed families—families in which only one spouse worked—suffered more from economic and social pressures. They were among the first groups in the community to engage in contraception. With few other alternatives to improve their family life, both husbands and wives enthusiastically experimented with various birth-control methods. Before effective contraceptive devices became widely available, housewives would extend the period of breastfeeding their most recent child in order to avoid conceiving another baby. Once contraceptive devices did become available, single-employed families became the first group to undergo IUD implantations, take hormonal birth control pills, and use condoms:

My husband was thrilled when he got a box of condoms from his best friend at work. He was amazed by them and glad to know that he could get them free from any drug store. Later on, the factory distributed them free at work too. It was effective.

I learned about condom from my sister-in-law after I had my second daughter. We lived in one compound house and were very close. She told me the idea and showed one that she got from her work. Several months later, my husband's factory started distribution too and we received them regularly with no cost. I took pills before but I lost my period and constantly felt uncomfortable. After getting the new idea, I gave up pills.

I tried IUD and pills, but none of them worked well. I worked on a construction site to riddle gravel. It was a tough job but the pay was good. Once I had IUD implanted, I was continually bleeding. Maybe my work was too tiresome, or the ring (IUD) did not work. I then went to the hospital to get rid of it.

There was little resistance from grandparents regarding their children's use of contraception. In many cases, young couples' parents were still living in rural villages with their brothers. A monthly remittance was sent home to support senior parents. Financial independence and the increasing role of adult children in providing financial support for seniors gave them a new-found autonomy in family decisions on reproduction and contraception. During my fieldwork, I heard of only one case in which a mother-in-law burned the condoms her son brought home. For the most part, grandparents not only allowed their adult children to manage their own reproductive lives, but they also actively helped out with household chores whenever necessary. To maintain family life within the socioeconomic limit had become as important to the older generation of in-laws and grandparents as having male descendants to continue the family line.

### **Able: The Spread of Contraceptive Knowledge and Utilization of Contraception**

The state's distribution of contraceptive devices and dissemination of knowledge about the various available forms of birth control facilitated a social transformation in fertility behaviors. The state's endorsement of birth planning justified an existing demand in the community and provided new methods for accomplishing an already-existing goal. The availability of effective methods of birth control coincided with the time of greatest economic and social strain—when urban families were struggling under increasingly harsh socioeconomic constraints and females' reproductive health was threatened by an imposed double burden of work and parenting and intensified by an inadequate food supply. The state's determined social engineering and the aggressive accumulation of development capital within its borders prepared urban Chinese to be “ready, willing, and able” for new demographic behaviors—and the fertility transition was accomplished.

Very quickly, the availability of contraceptive devices became known among the locals. Workers

knew where and how to obtain free contraceptive devices from their factories and elsewhere in the city. Official advocacy of contraception by the state quickly led to its embrace at the local level. Contraception offered new alternatives and opportunities for individual families to rethink and reshape their family life. News about ordinary families utilizing the novel methods of birth control that were being introduced to the public spread quickly and contraceptive methods rapidly gained more and more new adherents. Both men and women were open to new ideas about controlling childbearing and family size. Neighbors learned from one another about new contraceptive methods and how to employ them properly.

A female worker recalled how her curious neighbors found out about her deliberate use of birth control after the birth of her first daughter:

My husband regularly went to the drug store to get the condoms and none of us talked about this in the factory. One day a next door Dama came to me with great concerns. She asked me why I hadn't had any kids five years after my daughter (was born). She was afraid that I was sick and infertile. Back then it was normal for couples to have kids every two years. I told her what happened and she was so relieved and curious.

Between 1963 and 1964, there were 203,990 Tianjin residents who received free sterilization procedures and IUD implantations in local hospitals (Sun 1990, p.145). Contraceptive pills were introduced in the mid-1960s and were subsidized by the state to keep the prices low in factory clinics and local pharmacies. Of all the methods, the condom was the most popular and effective. Frequent reports of severe side effects from IUD implants and birth control pills discouraged couples from using them in great numbers. Women hesitated to implant foreign objects in their bodies, and many reported bleeding after the implantation. Those who took pills reported missing periods and interrupted menstrual cycles, which they found disconcerting. Unplanned pregnancies often led to voluntary abortions. Sterilization for both males and females still bore a negative stigma among much of the populace. People suspected that sterilization would cause both men and women to lose energy or interrupt their internal circulatory systems.

Xinfeng Factory organized regular distributions of free condoms to both male and female married employees in each workshop. Labor union designated a female cadre in charge of the distribution. Every month, she worked with female representatives in each workshop to give out packaged condoms along with other sanitary products to workers. Each married worker received his or her quota and the representative kept a record of the distribution. There were extra distributions before major holidays and employees' home-visits.

For female representatives, it was hard to overcome the embarrassment of handling contraceptive devices at first, especially when many of them were still unmarried. However, they treated contraceptive distribution as a political task for the good of the states that was assigned by the factory, and they relied on their factory managers for encouragement and recognition. Surprisingly, there were few cynical remarks, and workers rarely laughed at them. Co-workers' cooperative attitudes and immediate acceptance put the female representatives at ease. One representative recalled:

It was hard for both sides. Hard to say who was more embarrassed. We were all blushing. Later on, it became a routine and we all took it easily.

Both men and women used the contraceptive devices voluntarily, seizing an opportunity to improve, and exercise more control over, their lives. The choice of specific contraceptive methods demonstrated couples' attitude towards contraception. In their studies of birth control history in rural Sicily, Schneider and Schneider discovered that "coitus interruptus" was the most widely practiced contraceptive method among local artisan couples. While working together, artisan couples established rapport and communicated frankly with one another on the issue of contraception (Schneider and Schneider 1996). In the case of the urban Chinese, men and women's cooperation in adopting contraception methods was determined by the socioeconomic constraints they faced together on a daily basis. As victims of wage austerity and repression of consumption, both men and women relied on the state system for daily necessities. Double-burdened women

for the first time in the Chinese history won the ability to negotiate with the state directly. Men, however, depended on their wives' income to sustain them on a daily basis. Couples thus formed partnerships with respect to the repressive state as a result of the restrictive urban economy in the 1960s. By voluntarily utilizing free, publicly distributed condoms to control family size, a crucial factor for a family's standard of living, couples gained a rare and newfound control over their private behaviors and family lives while struggling to maximize the benefit that they derived from the state-imposed economic system in a particularly ascetic time period.

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### Fertility Rebound in 1967 and 1968

The phenomenon of voluntary utilization of contraception in the 1960s is also demonstrated by the baby boom that occurred during the Cultural Revolution. During this period of political revitalization, urbanites deliberately resisted imposed political constraints, including the intrusion of the state into their domestic lives, by spending more time and energy on household work and activities. The flexible factors in the domestic make-up of urban Chinese, family size and children's sex composition, are highly correlated with couples' available personal resources of time and energy. Any additional free time in a couple's daily schedule could lead to a reevaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of family size.

The unbearable domestic burden, rigid family economy, and the constrained work and family life of the 1960s forced couples to limit family size to a financially manageable number. Family decisions at that time were based on a comprehensive assessment of family income, available time, and individual energy. Any improvement or enhancement in these relevant conditions could motivate change in decisions about reproduction and birth control. For example, some couples received assigned dorms in Xinshuli and moved from other neighborhoods in the Hongqiao District. A much-shorter commute enabled couples to come home for lunch and have a couple of extra hours for housework.



As a result, they might determine that they had sufficient time, energy, and money to have one more child. Gan Dama and her three children used to live in Xinfeng's dorm in the Hongqiao. Every day, she spent at least two hours on the road commuting to work. Once her family moved into Xinshuli, the extra time that Gan Dama gained as a result of not having to commute was a huge relief for her and her family. Gan Dama decided to have a fourth child and was able to conveniently come home for lunch and breastfeeding every day.

During the Cultural Revolution, factories' output quota decreased and the administrators spent more time organizing political debates, campaigns, and studies. Workers were required to participate in political campaigns and sit in on meetings and group studies and participate in workshops. Workers spent their days studying political doctrine and Marxist and Leninist theories. Political studies were not as physically demanding as working. Workers slept, knitted, and chatted during the study sessions. Many extended their sick leaves with fake doctor notes. Prevailing resentment and cynical attitudes towards the political campaigns was also reflected in the change in the workers' time schedule. Couples began spending more time on household chores and considered having more children. In one office in Xinfeng Factory, of 12 female officers, 11 became pregnant at around the same time. One woman recalled:

When we all pregnant around the same time, our office head were quite annoyed. But what else could he do?

Other women's recollection also reaffirmed the childbearing pattern:

Among the kids of female workers, many were rabbits and then many sheep and monkeys.

In the Chinese zodiac system, the year 1963 was the Year of the Rabbit and the years 1967 and 1968 were the Years of the Sheep and Monkey, respectively. This reflection was coincident with two baby booms in the 1960s in Tianjin. The availability of contraception allowed workers and their families to plan their private lives and to express their resentment and resistance to a state-imposed hegemonic control. Despite the state's totalitarian control and its invasion into their private lives, urbanites

managed to ignore the politically advocated justifications for contraception and instead used birth control methods for their own private ends—to gain ultimate control over their daily lives and family arrangements and to maximize the benefit they derived from the state-controlled system.

## Conclusion

This chapter has adopted a holistic framework to understand the early fertility transition in urban China in the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> By paying extra attention to the relationship between the state and society, it has provided a historical and structural context for the reproductive decisions of the urban Chinese people within a political, economic, and cultural framework. This chapter emphasizes that individual reproductive activities are never separate from other aspects of social life, and that the state's regulation of population growth has always been tightly related to restrictions imposed in other domains. The state's policies on industrialization, migration, gender equality, social services, urban management, and consumption, all indirectly, but crucially, affected urban fertility and reproductive behavior during the 1960s.

In evaluating the impact of the state's family planning policy on the fertility decline, this chapter relates the family planning policy to the volatility of the nation's industrialization process.<sup>3</sup> As an organic part of China's comprehensive political and economic design for development, the policy

<sup>2</sup>Current development in historical studies of fertility transition and anthropological studies of human reproduction formulate a holistic research framework for understanding the dynamics of politics of reproduction (Greenhalgh 1990, 1995; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Kertzer and Fricke 1997).

<sup>3</sup>T. White challenged previous assumptions in the studies of China's population by placing the population policies on the periphery of Chinese politics. Her studies pointed out that there was a long and gradual history of the policy's formulating, evolving, and finally translating into a state-enforced program that totally controls citizen's reproductive life. During this long historical process, however, the population control program has always been a supplemental policy that serves the primary political and economic goals of the nation (White 1990, 1991, 1994a, b).

was constantly being shaped by the nation's overall socioeconomic condition. The state's enthusiastic promotion of family planning and birth control in the 1960s was compelled by its effort to overcome the internal contradictions in the socialist industrialization design. In the conservative 1960s, however, the state's dissemination of contraceptive knowledge and the distribution of contraceptive devices did not transform the social and cultural expectations of women's reproductive life and appropriate family size and composition, but did increase the availability of birth control methods at the local level. When individual families, compelled by socioeconomic constraints, consciously sought to control family size, they were able to access adequate and effective birth control methods.

From the local perspective, reproductive behaviors are seen here as the active adaptation of cultural rules to changing and diverse political and economic circumstances. In other words, reproductive behaviors have never been a passive reaction to political pressure or economic constraint. This is an arena where individual actors, small groups, and local communities display a remarkable degree of activism and agency in the domain of reproduction. To understand a fertility transition requires a combination of macro- and micro-concerns and an understanding of the dialectic relationship between over-arching constraints and local reactions.<sup>4</sup> The case of the urban Chinese in the 1960s illustrates that human reproduction is highly sensitive to various forms of power distribution—from the highly organized powers of the state and international forces to the local level of community pressure, where human reproductive activities are regulated and organized in the context of gender relationships, marriage customs, and the culture of parenting.

The early urban fertility transition in China was neither a direct outcome of the state's family planning policy, nor a sudden reevaluation of family size based on economic concerns. In the post-revolutionary period, the state was extremely active and was developing what would eventually become China's one-child policy, but the relationship between the state and society with respect to these matters was never direct and linear. Gender-differentiated state policies transmitted socioeconomic constraints to the community level and reconfigured gender relationships in both public and private arenas. Human reproduction, a focal point upon which these social constraints operated, became the central issue for local contestation and manipulation. In order to make a socially respectable living, urban families meticulously modified their lives and actively negotiated the benefits they derived from the state along the sensitive boundary between the public and the private. Among many of these strategic adjustments, perceptions changed regarding the appropriate number of children for each household.

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<sup>4</sup>My dissertation, on which this chapter is based, was inspired by similarly holistic demographic studies of fertility transition in Europe, China, and other regions. Some of these works are Bongaarts and Watkins (1996); Greenhalgh (1989); Kertzer (1995); Kreager (1986); Lesthaeghe (1991); Lesthaeghe and Wilson (1986); and Schneider and Schneider (1996).

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# Sex Preference for Children and Chinese Fertility in America

15

Zongli Tang

The correlation between offspring sex preference and fertility has received extensive empirical attention both cross-nationally and within a number of countries. Using a variety of measures, among them parity progression ratios, differential use of contraception, and the expressed desire for a particular gender composition, studies have shown that the preference for children of a certain sex varies among cultures. Asian and Middle Eastern countries tend to have a strong son preference, while cultures with a Spanish influence (Latin America, the Philippines) have shown a slight preference for daughters. Other cultures have shown a preference for gender balance, with varying degrees of son preference (Bongaarts 2001; Coombs 1979).

Studies have consistently shown that Americans favor at least one son and one daughter. Families with children of the same sex are more likely to have, or intend to have, more children. While the degree of desire for more children in families with only sons is not significantly different from that in families with only daughters, women with children of different sexes are more likely to stop childbearing (Freedman et al. 1960; Williamson 1976; Sloane and Lee 1983; Yamaguchi and Ferguson 1995; Pollard and Morgan 2002). Though Yamaguchi and Ferguson (1995) discovered that the sex composition of

previous children did not affect birth spacing (only birth stopping), Teachman and Schollaert (1989) found that both White and Black American women who had two children of the same sex tended to time their third birth more rapidly than women whose children had a gender balance.

Despite casting a wide net, our literature review has not found much attention paid to the issues of whether minorities, especially those with strong ethnic subcultural accouterments (such as son preference), share the same values as the majority in the United States and whether immigrants with such national heritages assimilate themselves to the mainstream norms in terms of offspring sex preference. This study, concerning itself with the relevance of son preference and other socioeconomic determinants to the marital fertility of Chinese-Americans and immigrants, intends to fill a void in this field.

Son preference is particularly strong in Eastern Asian countries including Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China (Clark 2000; Merli and Smith 2002; Knodel et al. 1996; Dodoo 1998; Arnold 1985). It is often asserted that son preference in these countries and regions is rooted in Confucian religious beliefs. The essence of son preference rests on the continuation of life from parents to children, through which short lives merge into long lives, and human life is mingled with nature. This value is considered the religious comfort or spiritual sustenance of Confucians (Tang 1995). Studies argue that the preference favoring sons has pronatalist effects on fertility behavior and that it has pre-

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vented a more rapid fertility decline in Eastern Asia (Larsen et al. 1998; Park and Cho 1995).

As we know, Asians in the United States, especially those from Eastern Asian countries, have the lowest fertility among the major ethnic groups. How can we link their fertility behavior with son preference, which, as mentioned above, has a pronatalist outcome? This study intends to explore this issue by examining how the normative attitude affects Chinese-American reproductive behavior and whether the influence is positive in encouraging fertility.

Our discussion will not be confined to individual fertility behavior. Differential attitudes towards the offspring sex preference reflect varied ethnic cultures, especially values with regard to gender roles in society and in a family. Studying son preference and its effects on the fertility behavior of a minority group is actually examining the differences and interactions between the mainstream culture and ethnic subcultures. As a minority group, Chinese-Americans consist of two groups: the native-born (or American-born) and the foreign-born (or immigrants). Both groups need to integrate themselves into the mainstream culture. To what degree have they adopted the dominant norm of one son and one daughter? To what degree have they adopted the emerging gender indifference and greater gender equality in American society? This study will give us an opportunity to examine such ethnic differences as well as the role that assimilation plays in diminishing the differences.

Having a child is generally a joint decision made by the wife and the husband in a family. Son preference is a normative product of a patriarchal society. Breaking the norm means supporting the reduction of the dominant male roles, or stated in a different way, undermining men's privileged position in society and in a family. In doing so, there would be an attitudinal gap between men and women because of their inclination to gender roles. Therefore, the husband and the wife would probably adopt different postures on son preference when making fertility decisions. This attitudinal gap has never been examined empirically, perhaps owing to limitations of survey data such as the National Survey

of Family Growth (NSFG) and the Current Population Survey (CPS) that have been employed in pioneer studies. This study intends to inspect this issue by using the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the U. S. Census (individual files). We believe that for the coverage and sample size, PUMS data offers an advantage to an empirical testing.

In pioneer studies, the stress was usually placed on the correlation between offspring sex preference and fertility. Socioeconomic determinants of the preference were often overlooked. Occasionally, studies mentioned that these factors, such as educational and occupational opportunities for women and the presence of family planning initiatives, might work in combination with the sex preference (Freedman 1997; McNicoll 2001). Yet, an empirical test has never been conducted. Analyzing the correlation between sex preference and its determinants is another objective of this study.

Chinese-Americans were chosen as the target population because of their Confucian heritage and their large population size relative to other segments of Asian-Americans. We believe that this group affords us an ideal case for an empirical testing.

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## Method

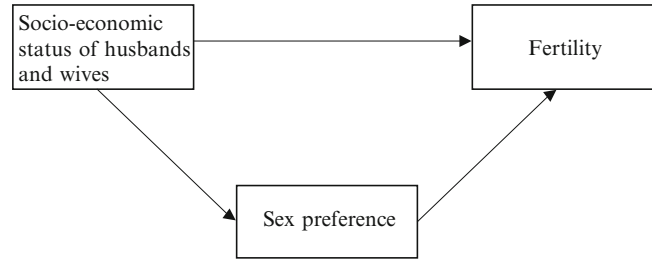
### Theoretical Model

Figure 15.1 demonstrates the theoretical model, in which Chinese marital fertility behavior is determined by offspring sex preference, a normative factor, and the socioeconomic statuses of the husband and the wife in a family. At the same time, the socioeconomic statuses of the husband and the wife affect their attitude towards the sex preference, and thus indirectly determine fertility behavior.

A Chinese wife's socioeconomic status is operationalized as individual educational attainment, income, age, immigrant status, and period status, while a Chinese husband's socioeconomic status is operationalized as individual educational attainment and immigration status. We choose only two variables for husbands (or fathers) for



**Fig. 15.1** Theoretical model



two reasons. First, the focus of the study is on the wife or mother's side as reproduction is mainly a woman's behavior. Second, educational attainment and immigration status are the most important variables in describing socioeconomic characteristics of a Chinese man for the purposes of our research.

Highly educated people, or the elite, are more likely to be open to new worldviews. So, we hypothesize that variables such as education and income will be negatively correlated with family size, as well as with the strength of the influence of son preference. Meanwhile, the variable of age will exert positive impact on fertility and son preference as older people would hold more traditional values and would bear more children.

Immigration status refers to whether the Chinese person is foreign-born or American-born. Since the American-born Chinese have been highly integrated to the mainstream culture, we assume that these Chinese will be less likely to be linked to pronatalist tradition and son preference. In contrast, the foreign-born Chinese would retain more attachments to "old world" norms, so we assume that they will be more likely to be affected by son preference and have more children. Moreover, according to the assimilation theory, traditional influence on immigrants varies with the length of exposure to the host country. In Okun's (1996) study of Israeli Jewish women, later groups of Asian and African immigrants, who had come from cultures with a strong son preference and high fertility, showed more son preference than earlier groups. We therefore further hypothesize that son preference and pronatalist tradition will diminish with increasing exposure to the host society among the foreign-born Chinese or immigrants.

Period status is treated as a socioeconomic variable because fertility and reproductive norms change over time. Since the 1960s, almost all ethnicities in the United States have experienced fertility decline. Americans as a whole have gradually shifted from traditional gender role attitudes to shared roles and egalitarianism (Pollard and Morgan 2002). In examination of such historical consequences and influences, we hypothesize that the most recent cohort of Chinese-Americans will be less traditional in terms of offspring sex preference and family size.

## Data

The 5% PUMS of the 1990 and 2000 censuses (individual files) are employed in this study. The units of analysis are currently married Chinese women (aged 18–44) with children. White married women in the same age group will be used as a reference group. To simplify analysis as well as to avoid any cultural bias, Chinese and White women with interracial marriage are not considered in this study. There were 8,669 Chinese and 680,086 White women of such characteristics in the PUMS of the 2000 census, and 7,168 Chinese and 612,543 White women in the PUMS of the 1990 census, covering all the fifty states and the District of Columbia.

The term "Chinese" is used to designate the population of Chinese origin or descent in the United States. The term "Whites" refer to those Whites who are not identified as Hispanics. As mentioned previously, the larger sample size and the broader coverage make the PUMS data superior to the NSFG and the CPS that have long been used by researchers in this field. Using the PUMS data, we are able to explore the fertility behavior of

Asian-Americans like the Chinese, who have been omitted by most surveys because of the small group size in comparison with Hispanic and African-American ethnicities.

There were no fertility questions in the 2000 census. In determining the sex of children, measuring parities, and calculating the number of children-ever-born, we use the information of “co-resident children” in the 1990 and 2000 censuses. In doing so, there would be no difficulty with families of below-college age children but there would be concerns with families of college or above-college age children, for these families may not report these children as co-residents. To reduce the disadvantage, we limit our discussion to married women under age 44.

In the following analyses, we will first use cross-tabulations to illustrate the general trend of the offspring sex preference and its effect on Chinese fertility behavior in comparison with whites, and interpret the impact of socioeconomic factors including education, age, assimilation, and history on individual attitudes towards the preference. Then, using path analysis, we will conduct an empirical test on the theoretical model displayed in Fig. 15.1.

## Results

### General Trend

Table 15.1 presents parity progression probabilities for Chinese and White women aged 18–44. For the purpose of analyzing age impact, these women are further classified into two age sub-groups: 18–39 and 40–44, since too few women in the PUMS have higher-order births to support a meaningful statistical analysis, thus restricting discussion to the timing of parities 2, 3, and 4.

Whites, aged 18–44, show higher probabilities at all three parities, indicating that they bore more children than the Chinese on average. Whites also show little evidence of son preference as there is almost no difference of the likelihood of having a second, third, or fourth child between those with previous children of all girls and those with previous children of all boys. The Chinese in the same age group display patterns similar to Whites at parity 2 and different from Whites at parities 3 and 4. At parity 2, the difference of likelihood of having another child is quite small between mothers whose first child is a boy and

**Table 15.1** Parity progression probabilities for Chinese and White women

Sex of previous children	Progression probability					
	Age 18–44		Age 18–39		Age 40–44	
	Chinese	Whites	Chinese	Whites	Chinese	Whites
Parity 2						
M	0.595	0.666	0.551	0.644	0.681	0.771
F	0.595	0.666	0.545	0.641	0.695	0.771
Total	0.595	0.666	0.548	0.642	0.688	0.771
Parity 3						
MM	0.239	0.380	0.205	0.350	0.268	0.485
FF	0.344	0.383	0.288	0.350	0.425	0.482
MF	0.192	0.303	0.174	0.287	0.221	0.388
Total	0.235	0.343	0.207	0.248	0.281	0.438
Parity 4						
MMM	0.231	0.320	0.212	0.262	0.257	0.402
FFF	0.311	0.316	0.300	0.254	0.420	0.399
MMF	0.201	0.260	0.212	0.222	0.185	0.337
FFM	0.220	0.263	0.213	0.227	0.210	0.338
Total	0.229	0.278	0.224	0.234	0.235	0.357
Mean fertility	1.781	1.928	1.687	1.781	1.937	2.001

**Table 15.2** Odds ratios of Chinese and White women

Sex of previous children	Odds ratios					
	Age 18–44		Age 18–39		Age 40–44	
	Chinese	Whites	Chinese	Whites	Chinese	Whites
Parity 2						
F/M	0.997**	1.000**	0.976**	0.987**	1.067**	1.000**
Parity 3						
FF/MM	1.4961**	0.995**	1.468**	1.001**	1.819**	0.989**
Same/Mixed	1.4692**	1.415**	1.420**	1.3412**	1.527**	1.479**
Parity 4						
FFF/MMM	1.505*	0.981**	1.393*	0.9597**	1.561*	0.988**
Same/Mixed	1.414*	1.216**	1.266*	1.151**	1.568*	1.309*

Notes: \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$

those whose first child is a girl. At parities 3 and 4, the likelihood of having another child is obviously higher for the Chinese with girls than those with boys. In other words, Chinese mothers with previous children as girls are more likely to have another child than those with previous children as boys. This suggests a strong son preference.

To further estimate the magnitude of the effect of the sex of previous children on the next birth, we regressed (for the Chinese and Whites separately) the odds of having a second, third, or fourth birth on the contrast of girl(s) versus boy(s) as well as the contrast of same-sex versus mixed-sex. Table 15.2 presents the resulting odds ratios. Ratios greater than 1.0 will indicate an increased likelihood of a second, third, or fourth birth for those with girl(s) (versus boys) and for those with same-sex (versus mixed-sex) compositions.

The odds ratio for Chinese women aged 18–44 on the contrast of girl versus boy (i.e., F/M in the table) is almost unit one (0.997) at parity 2, once again indicating that the Chinese, on average, are not driven by son preference in making a decision on the second birth. However, son preference operates on higher-order births. The ratio on the contrast of girls versus boys increases by 49.6% at parity 3 (i.e., FF/MM), and 50.5% at parity 4 (i.e., FFF/MMM). By contrast, it decreases 0.5% and 1.9%, respectively, for Whites at parities 3 and 4. Additionally, White families with same-sex children (i.e., only sons or only daughters) are more likely to progress to the third or fourth birth than are those with a

mixed-sex composition. Chinese-Americans display a similar pattern though their preference for a gender mix is not as strong as their preference for sons.

### Age Impact

As noted previously, the Chinese aged between 18 and 44 as a whole do not show impressive preference for sons when making a decision on the second birth. Yet, it can be seen in Table 15.2 (as well as in Table 15.1) that older mothers (aged 40–44) behave differently from the younger mothers (aged 18–39). In the younger group, a mother who has a girl is not more likely to bear another child than one who has a boy. However, a mother in the older group who has a girl is more likely to bear another child than one who has a boy.

Age effect appears further at parities 3 and 4. Mothers at these parities who have girls are more likely to have another child than mothers who have boys no matter what age group, but, as shown by the ratios, the likelihood increases faster in the older group than does it in the younger, indicating that the degree of the strength varies with ages.

The fact that the younger mothers act differently from the old ones can be attributed to the following reasons. First, the younger mothers are more willing to accept new ideas and therefore more likely to assimilate to the mainstream culture, thus preferring a gender balance. Second,

**Table 15.3** Odds ratios by education for Chinese and White women aged 18–44

Sex of previous children	Odds ratios					
	Education					
	1		2		3	
	Chinese	Whites	Chinese	Whites	Chinese	Whites
Parity 2						
F/M	1.081**	1.013**	0.985**	0.995**	0.889**	0.947**
Parity 3						
FF/MM	1.631*	1.038**	1.332*	1.000**	1.195*	0.918**
Same/mixed	1.523*	1.423**	1.453*	1.423**	1.364*	1.409**

Notes: \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$

when approaching the end space of childbearing, the older mothers feel more pressure from ethnic traditions and therefore decide to bear another child in hopes of having at least one son.<sup>1</sup>

### Educational Impact

In the following two sections, discussion will be limited to parities 2 and 3 due to there being too few women left at parity 4 after disintegration. In Table 15.3, we classify women with high school education or less in the PUMS as Group 1, those with some years of college up to university graduation as Group 2, and those with graduate education and beyond (including master, doctoral, and professional degrees) as Group 3. From the table we see that increasing educational attainment makes the Chinese less traditional, or stated in a different way, more integrated with American culture. At parity 2, the odds ratio on the contrast of girl versus boy (i.e., F/M) is greater than one for Group 1 but less than one for Groups 2 and 3, showing that well-educated Chinese women who have daughters are not more likely to bear a second child than those who are situated in the same

classes but have sons. By contrast, less-educated Chinese women who have daughters are more likely to bear a second child than those who are situated in the same classes but have sons.<sup>2</sup>

At parity 3, while the odds ratio (i.e., FF/MM) is greater than one for all the three groups, it declines with increasing educational attainment, suggesting that although son preference affects decisions of all Chinese on the third birth, it is weaker among members of the well-educated Chinese.

An interesting finding, which has not been observed in prior studies, is that Whites with various educational backgrounds behave somewhat differently even if this group as a whole do not have a son preference. In Table 15.3, the odds ratios on the contrast of girl(s) versus boy(s) at parities 2 and 3 are less than one in Groups 2 and 3, but slightly higher than one in Group 1. An underlying son preference is probably present among Whites of the lower social classes, though a gender balance is generally preferred.

In addition, Whites of various social classes exhibit a convergence toward shared roles or egalitarianism as shown in Table 15.3, in which odds ratios on the contrast of same versus mixed sex change very little across educational levels among Whites. Yet, such convergence does not display with the Chinese. Their odds ratios on the contrast of same versus mixed fluctuate greatly.

<sup>1</sup>The higher likelihood to have another child for both Chinese and White women with male children at parity 2 and other parities in Table 15.2 does not necessarily mean a preference for daughters. Since we use children-ever-born as the fertility measurement, the higher likelihood could be caused by a female survival rate, which is lower than the male one.

<sup>2</sup>Once again, the higher likelihood for those with boys does not necessarily mean a preference for daughters.

**Table 15.4** Odds ratios by immigration status for the second and third births (aged 18–44)

	Actual				Standardized			
	Immigration status				Immigration status			
	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total
Parity 2								
F/M	1.045*	1.004**	0.994**	0.997**	0.9667*	1.005**	1.053**	1.0186
Parity 3								
FF/MM	0.983*	1.615*	1.506*	1.4961**	0.9745*	1.579*	1.422*	1.4656
Same/mixed	1.113*	1.542*	1.434*	1.4692**	1.3074*	1.5618*	1.4686*	1.4827

Notes: \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$

## Assimilation Impact

Table 15.4 shows odds ratios by immigration status. The American-born Chinese are classified as Group 1, the naturalized foreign-born Chinese as Group 2, and the non-naturalized foreign-born Chinese as Group 3. The process of gradual acculturation to the destination society is posited to occur from generation to generation. The greater the length of exposure to the norms and values of the host society, the more closely the offspring sex preference of minorities will match the pattern of the non-immigrant majority; the inverse is true as well. According to the assimilation hypothesis, the American-born Chinese (i.e., Group 1) would be least likely to be influenced by son preference, and their odds ratios on the contrast of girl(s) versus boy(s) would be the lowest of the three groups. By the same logic, the non-naturalized foreign-born Chinese (i.e., Group 3) would be most likely to be affected by son preference, and their odds ratios on the contrast of girl(s) versus boy(s) would be the highest. Meanwhile, the naturalized foreign-born Chinese (i.e., Group 2) would be situated at the mid-level.

Table 15.4 shows that at parity 2, Group 1 does not hold the lowest but the highest odds ratio on the contrast of girl versus boy. At parity 3, Group 1 holds the lowest as expected, but the highest is found with Group 2 rather than Group 3.

As members of various social classes act differently on traditions, educational composition within the three groups would distort the results shown above. To eliminate such effects, we standardized the odds ratios on the educational composition of Whites (see the last column in

Table 15.4). After that, at parity 2, Group 3 rises to the highest level of the F/M ratios, and Group 1 drops to the lowest, meeting the expectations of the assimilation hypothesis. At parity 3, group positions do not change with standardization. Though the highest is not found with Group 3 as expected, the foreign-born Chinese as a whole hold higher ratios than the native-born. Therefore, it is now clear that the influence of son preference on the foreign-born Chinese is stronger than that on the native-born Chinese. Yet, immigrants do not behave as the assimilation hypothesis expects. A longer stay in this country does not change their traditional attitude towards the offspring sex preference and childbearing.

## Historical Impact

Table 15.5 presents population proportions and mean fertilities by immigration status and educational attainment calculated from 1990 and 2000 PUMS data. Chinese-American fertility is observed decreasing dramatically during the decade of 1990–2000 (see the column “Regular”).

Many factors contribute to the decline. First, as shown in Table 15.5, increased educational attainment and immigration flow greatly altered population composition, thus negatively affecting Chinese-American fertility. Second, Chinese-American fertility in 2000 declined overwhelmingly across not only the two foreign-born groups but also the three educational groups (see the column “regular” in Table 15.5). Controlling for education and immigration variables, fertility



**Table 15.5** Population proportions and mean fertilities in 1990 and 2000 for Chinese mothers aged 18–44

	Population proportions		Mean fertility		
	1990	2000	1990	2000	
	%	%	Regular	Regular	Standardized
Immigration status					
1	9.1	5.4	1.821	1.909	1.905
2	49.0	49.3	2.002	1.917	1.924
3	41.9	45.2	1.910	1.617	1.718
Total	100	100			
Education level					
1	40.5	32.7	2.193	2.035	2.021
2	45.7	43.6	1.813	1.713	1.731
3	13.8	23.8	1.667	1.552	1.642
Total	100	100	1.947	1.780	1.836

**Table 15.6** Chinese fertility and contributions made by normative changes

	Mean fertility (per woman)		Changes since 1990
	1990	2000	%
Parity 2	1.6629	1.5948	−4.1
Parity 3	1.8721	1.7349	−7.3
Parity 4	1.9242	1.7671	−8.5
Total	1.9542	1.7828	−8.8

change could be mostly attributed to a normative transition or an attitudinal shift from big families to small families.

Some may argue that fertility decline by education and immigration status can be caused by compositional change of immigration in education groups or compositional change of education in immigration groups that occurred during the decade. To remove such effects, we standardized the 2000 figures on the 1990 composition. Comparing the standardized results (the column “Standardization”) with the non-standardized (the column “Regular”) in Table 15.5, we do not find significant differences. Hence, time effects on composition can be ignored.

Further evidence in support of the normative transition from a large family to a small family is presented in Table 15.6, which shows the 2000 fertility dropping more quickly with increasing parity, declining by 4.1% at parity 2, 7.3% at parity 3, and 8.5% at parity 4. It suggests that more and more Chinese families lost interest in having births at high parities.

In Table 15.5, of the two foreign-born groups, the non-naturalized group (i.e., Group 3) experienced larger extent of decline in terms of the mean fertility as compared with the naturalized group (i.e., Group 2). It could be partly attributed to a conversion away from the big family tradition that took place in China beginning in the early 1990s owing to the one child policy and rapid economic development. The normative change in the sending country would not affect Chinese immigrants who arrived in this country before 1990 but would definitely affect those who arrived after 1990.

Unlike the two foreign-born groups, the native-born group slightly increased their births during the decade. This behavior can possibly be explained by their higher degree of integration into the mainstream culture of gender balance in comparison with the previous cohort. Preference for a gender balance would bring more children to families, especially those with high education. We will further explore this issue later.

## Comprehensive Analysis

We have analyzed the general trend of Chinese sex preference for children in comparison with whites, and have discussed the impacts of education, assimilation, and history on the preference and fertility separately on the mother's side. Now we need to figure out the father's role in the formation of sex preference for children. In addition, a comprehensive analysis is necessary to explore interactions of all the variables as illustrated by the theoretical model in Fig. 15.1. Path analysis, a form of multiple-regression developed by Wright in 1934 and applied to demography originally by Duncan (1966), will be the statistical tool to achieve the above goals. The role of path analysis in causal model development is in the interpretation and the decomposition of a dependent variable, and it helps to make explicit the logic of conventional regression calculations.

Of the socioeconomic variables in the model, there are two education variables (i.e., father's education or FEDU and mother's education or MEDU), which refer to years of formal education of Chinese mothers and fathers; two immigration status variables (i.e., father's immigration status or FIMG and mother's immigration status or MIMG), which are the number of years Chinese mothers and fathers have lived in the United States (American-born Chinese are awarded 50 years plus his/her age); one historical influence variable (PERIOD), which is a dummy variable, coded as 1990=0, 2000=1; and two other variables, Chinese mothers' income (MINCOME) and age (MAGE), which are all ratio data.

Chinese fertility is measured by the number of children-ever-born (CEB), derived from the 1990 and 2000 censuses. Since it is very rare for Chinese families to have more than four children, the discussion will be limited to married couples with less than five children.

Sex preference for children is a dummy variable. We assume that Chinese women's fertility behavior is first driven by son preference, then by the preference for a gender balance, having one son and one daughter at least. Based on this logic, the variable is measured by the effect of sex(s) of previous child (or children) on the last

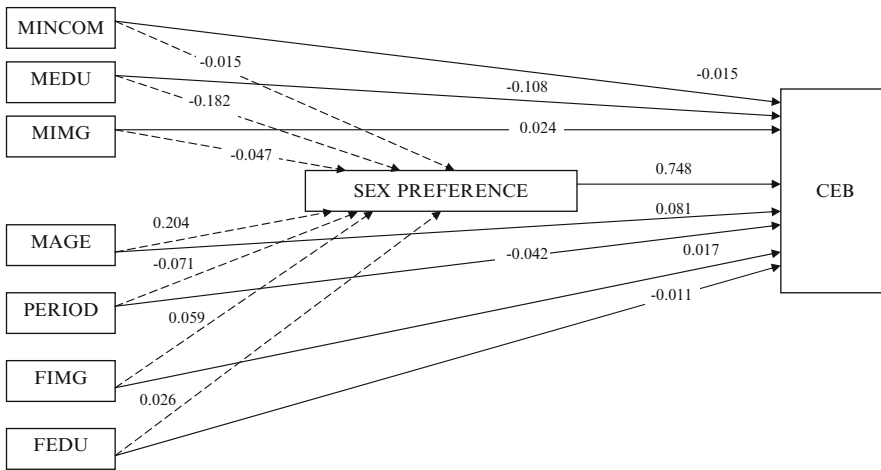
birth. Mothers with only one child are coded as 0. Mothers with two children are coded as one for those having a boy as the first child, and two for those having a girl as the first child. Mothers with three children are coded as one for those having two boys already because their purpose for the last birth is probably a girl, two for those having a boy and a girl because their purpose is probably a boy, and three for those having two girls because their purpose is definitely a boy. Mothers with four children are coded as one for those having three boys as the first three children because their purpose for the last birth is a girl, two for those having one boy and two girls because their purpose is probably a girl, three for those having two girls and one boy because their purpose is probably a boy, and four for those having three girls because their purpose is definitely a boy.

Table 15.7 presents the zero-order correlation matrix for the five socioeconomic variables of Chinese mothers, two socioeconomic variables of Chinese fathers, the sex preference, and CEB as displayed in the theoretical model. The strongest correlation exists between the sex preference and the number of CEB ( $r=0.79$ ), which is also positively related with MAGE ( $r=0.241$ ), FIMG ( $r=0.093$ ), and MIMG ( $r=0.059$ ), and negatively related with MINCOME ( $r=-0.074$ ), PERIOD ( $r=-0.091$ ), MEDU ( $r=-0.243$ ), and FEDU ( $r=-0.0143$ ).

Figure 15.2 displays effects of the sex preference and other socioeconomic determinants on fertility. The path coefficients are the standardized partial regression coefficients (betas) from multiple regression equations. Each of them denotes the amount of standard deviation change in the dependent variable of a 1-standard-deviation change in the independent variables (controlled for other independent variables). All these independent variables are statistically significant at the 5% level. The residual effects are not shown here. In Fig. 15.2, the fertility behavior is first affected by the sex preference and other determinants. At the same time, the sex preference, the strength of son preference in particular, is determined by socioeconomic characteristics of mothers and fathers, which work on fertility indirectly in combination with the sex preference.

**Table 15.7** Matrix of zero-order correlation coefficients between social-economic status and sex preference on CEB

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 MINCOME		0.089	0.168	0.128	0.264	0.056	0.140	-0.044	-0.074
2 MAGE			0.067	0.052	-0.045	0.070	-0.002	0.212	0.241
3 PERIOD				-0.048	-0.011	-0.117	0.031	-0.066	-0.091
4 MIMG					0.147	0.373	-0.058	0.053	0.059
5 MEDU						0.069	0.618	-0.167	-0.243
6 FIMG							0.164	0.090	0.093
7 FEDU								-0.084	-0.143
8 SEX PREFERENCE									0.790
9 CEB									—



**Fig. 15.2** Empirical model

Table 15.8 presents the total, direct, and indirect effects of these independent variables on CEB. The total effect of a variable on CEB is the zero-order correlation coefficient. The direct effect is the path coefficient between the independent variable and CEB. The indirect effect is the difference between the total effect and direct effect, and it could be decomposed into two components: the indirect effect on CEB via the sex preference and Other (or joint or spurious) effect.

Variables including MINCOME, MEDU, MAGE, and FEDU do not show any results conflicting with observations in pioneer studies. Therefore, we will focus on the other variables and the interaction between the sex preference

and its determinants. The sex preference for children exerts a positive direct effect on CEB ( $p=0.748$ ), indicating that traditional norms, son preference in particular, are of the greatest importance to Chinese fertility behavior. The variable PERIOD correlates negatively to CEB, suggesting a constant decline in fertility over time. Interestingly, the time spent living in this country for both mothers and fathers (i.e., MIMG and FIMG) is positively related to fertility, denoting two possible facts. First, the foreign-born Chinese would bear more children with an increasing length of stay in America. Second, the American-born Chinese would bear more children than the foreign-born.

**Table 15.8** Effects of independent variables on CEB

Variable	Total	Direct	Total indirect	Indirect via sex preference	Other
SEX PREFERENCE	0.790	0.747	0.043		
MEDU	-0.243	-0.108	-0.135	-0.182	0.047
MIMG	0.059	0.024	0.035	-0.047	-0.020
PERIOD	-0.091	-0.042	-0.049	-0.071	0.022
MAGE	0.241	0.081	0.160	0.204	-0.044
MINCOME	-0.074	-0.015	-0.059	-0.015	-0.044
FIMG	0.093	0.017	0.076	0.059	0.017
FEDU	-0.143	-0.011	-0.132	0.026	0.158

Of the four mother's variables, the strength of son preference is negatively related to education ( $p=-0.164$ ), income ( $p=-0.015$ ), and immigration ( $p=-0.064$ ), consistent with findings revealed earlier, reflecting effects of education and assimilation, though the assimilation effects are not significant among immigrants. The positive correlation between mother's age and son preference shows that older people would be more likely to be influenced by traditions. As mentioned previously, they may also feel greater pressure from ethnic traditions than younger people as they approach the end space of childbearing, and therefore they want to have another birth in hopes of having at least one son. Period ( $p=-0.076$ ) shows negative correlation with son preference, indicating a trend of decline on traditions since 1990. Of these variables, education holds the greatest extent of negative influence on the formation of son preference.

Interestingly, the two father's variables, education and immigration, are positively related with son preference. Fathers act differently from mothers; educational attainment and a longer stay in this country do not make them more open to shared roles and egalitarianism. It provides evidence of stronger son preference among Chinese men, suggesting in a broader sense that in comparison with women, men would be less willing to support a social movement that leads to deteriorating patriarchal dominance. Men would be more willing to retain the current gender system that is benefiting them.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the correlation between the sex preference and fertility among Chinese-Americans using 1990 and 2000 PUMS data. We have discovered that while Chinese-Americans prefer a gender balance like Whites, they do show a strong son preference. The effect of the preference might not be evident on the second birth but is apparent on later births.

For minorities and immigrants, fertility behavior is affected by various socioeconomic factors including educational (or occupational) opportunities, age, birthplace, and the length of exposure to the host society. These factors also influence people's attitude toward son preference, or stated in a different way, work in combination with son preference. Having empirically analyzed direct and indirect effects, we find that women's educational attainment plays the greatest role in depressing the impact of son preference. However, it by no means indicates an absence of the preference among the well-educated Chinese, especially when it comes to making decisions about later births.

Our research shows that the American-born Chinese, who have greatly integrated with the dominant culture, share the same family value as Whites, represented by the preference for one son and one daughter. In comparison, the foreign-born Chinese display a strong son preference. This finding gives support to the assimilation hypothesis to certain degree.

Nevertheless, as illustrated by analyses of odds ratios, immigrants who were awarded citizenship, or stayed longer in this country, appear more likely to be affected by son preference, while non-naturalized-immigrants, or those who arrived recently, exhibit less likelihood. This finding, which seems contradictory to the expectations of the assimilation hypothesis, reflects disruption effects. Immigrants do not have time to practice traditional values in reproduction due to their hardship in the immigration process. In fact, the higher likelihood and the higher fertility with naturalized-immigrants indicates that traditional influence is so strong that once immigrants overcome initial difficulties, they would speed up childbearing to meet the requirement of having at least one son. Unlike structural assimilation, cultural or normative assimilation is more difficult to achieve, especially when it requires a diversion from the group's core values. Son preference as the religious comfort or spiritual sustenance of Chinese people is one such value.

The role played by age should be explained carefully. As shown in this study, the influence of son preference increases with age. It may indicate differing attitudes towards traditions across age groups. The younger Chinese are more open to new ideas, while the older ones do not want to break with the old world. However, the age effect may just make known the fact that son preference is more effective on high-order births, usually occurring at the later stages of childbearing.

In relation to son preference, Chinese men behave somewhat differently from women. Education does not work as a depressing factor as it does on women, nor does assimilation weaken the influence of son preference, suggesting men's inflexible attitude toward gender roles in family and in society. Without pushing from women, men would not be as willing to give up their privilege awarded by the patriarchal society.

It is generally believed that son preference has pronatalist effects, as people would have more children in hopes of giving birth to sons. Son preference encourages Chinese fertility indeed. As indicated by this study, of the socioeconomic determinants, son preference is of greatest importance to Chinese fertility behavior. How, then,

can we understand the connection between son preference and the low fertility existing in Chinese society? Fertility below the replacement level is common today not only in the Chinese-American community, but also in East Asian countries and regions that are under strong influence of Confucian doctrines, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The crux of son preference lies in the continuity of the family in a patriarchal line. There is no necessity today in the societies mentioned above to bear a large number of children to guarantee that at least one son will survive to adulthood. With a sound welfare system, people do not need to depend on their children for old age support either. Given the decreasing utility of having more children and the increasing cost of caring for and educating children, people can do better with fewer children. Combined with other events, for instance, marrying later (or not at all) and delaying childbirth due to increased educational and occupational opportunities, the correlation between a large family size and son preference as it existed before is no longer present in urbanized (or modernized) Confucian countries and regions. Freedman (1986) points out that son preference in the Chinese world would continue to be strong, but a smaller number of sons and children now satisfy this preference.

Bongaarts and Potter (1983) state that if a couple bears children until they have at least one son, then they will have an average of 1.94 births. However, if a couple stops having children only after having a daughter and a son, then they will have an average of three births. This to some degree explains why Chinese-Americans hold lower fertility than Whites as well as why the American-born Chinese have more children on average than the foreign-born Chinese.

Son preference will continue to influence Chinese reproductive behavior positively since it helps to prevent further fertility decline especially among well-educated Chinese and immigrants. Yet, the impact of the preference has been diminishing. As shown in this study, son preference mainly affects childbirth at higher parities. Those with final births beyond two children made up only 19% of the total Chinese families in the



2000 census. That is to say, son preference works mainly on a small range of Chinese families or mainly on those with two or more than two previous children of all girls. These factors along with Chinese achievement in education and difficulties in the immigration process contribute to the low fertility of the Chinese in America.

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# Social Stratification and Childrearing Values in Contemporary China

16

Xiao Hong

Literature on child socialization has documented an enduring relationship between social class and childrearing values. While middle-class families place greater emphasis on their children's autonomy, working-class families are more concerned with children's conformity (Alwin 1984, 1989; Gecas 1979; Kohn 1977; Kohn and Schooler 1983; Spade 1991). There is a major difference between autonomy and conformity; while the former refers to behavior guided by internal standards, the latter refers to behavior driven by externally imposed rules (Kohn 1977). Researchers believe that these values either facilitate or inhibit children's upward social mobility.

The development of the class-value theory, however, has been mostly based on research undertaken in the market economy or the capitalist society. With the exception of Kohn et al. (1990), empirical research linking class and childrearing values has focused primarily on capitalist societies such as the USA, Italy, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan. In a rare research comparing stratification systems in both the capitalist and the socialist, Western and Eastern societies, Kohn and his colleagues (1990) examined childrearing values in the USA, Japan, and Poland. They found that, in all three societies, social class is consistently related to values. Men who are high

in the social order are more likely to value self-direction for children than men who are lower in the social order. Other empirical investigations of non-Western market economies (because data on command economies are scarce) reported similar findings (Ellis et al. 1978; Ellis and Petersen 1992; Ho and Kang 1984; Kohn et al. 1986; Ma and Smith 1993; Olsen 1973, 1975). From these studies, the implication is that the class-linked valuation of autonomy and conformity is a common phenomenon associated with all societies and all political economies.

This research argues that structure of childrearing values differs in the market and the command economy. It is true that in all economies, childrearing values are shaped by the individual's social position and by the influence of the social milieu, but each political economy evokes a set of mechanisms that condition the status attainment process. In the market economy, education and occupation determine one's position in social structure. While years of schooling may not be perfectly related to occupational achievement and earnings, the impact of education on status attainment is consistent and significant. Better-educated individuals are more likely to move up in the occupational hierarchy and pay scale. In a command economy such as China, the central government controls the allocation of labor and material resources. Government policies, rather than market forces, determine occupational opportunities and reward structures. In such an economy, redistribution system gives rise to different mechanisms of stratification.

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Much has been written in recent years on social structure and status attainment in contemporary China. Literature on intergenerational mobility suggests that mechanisms of stratification in socialist China differ very much from those identified in market societies. For instance, occupational mobility and earnings depend as much on educational credentials as on political loyalty (Li and Walder 2001; Walder 1995; Xie and Hannum 1996). Access to education is often influenced by state policies, and superb education may sometimes lead to downward occupational mobility (Davis 1992; Wu 2008). Especially during the period of the Cultural Revolution, the first and most important criterion for college admission and career opportunities was political performance (Deng and Treiman 1997). Furthermore, entrance into job sectors, rather than the job per se, constitutes the primary goal of status attainment (Bian 1994, 2002; Lin and Bian 1991). Until the 1990s job change and labor mobility were subject to strict local or state government control (Wu and Treiman 2007; Zhou et al. 1996).

Political campaigns and policy shifts characterize China's post-1949 history. Scholars who study social stratification in contemporary China agree that educational and career opportunities have fluctuated radically over time and that changes in state policies have dramatically altered opportunity structures and individual life chances (Deng and Treiman 1997; Liu 2006; Nee 1996). Millions of Chinese experienced a disjuncture between educational attainment and occupational status across historical periods and over an individual life course. Capable and motivated youth were denied college education because of undesirable family class status. Political performance standards, rather than educational credentials, influence individual mobility into elite professional and managerial positions. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that education and occupation exhibit different influences on childrearing values in China's unique political and social context. Specifically I hypothesize that social class and education influence childrearing values in China. The magnitude of the effect of social class is,

however, not as strong as that observed in market economies.

Structure of childrearing values received little attention in the literature on status attainment in the Chinese context despite its importance in social mobility theory. While recent research has documented China's distinctive social mobility patterns, there is little investigation on the psychological consequences of the stratification system. Childrearing values influence not only people's behaviors in raising children (Kohn 1977) but also children's destination in social structure (Mortimer 1974; Rossi and Rossi 1991). Therefore, an examination of the structure of childrearing values enhances our understanding of the process of status reproduction in socialist China. Using a recently available large-scale survey data, this research examines specifically the effects of social class and education on Chinese socialization values.

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## Data and Measures

This study uses data from the Chinese sample in the World Values Survey (Inglehart 1994). Working with the World Values Study Group (1994), Chinese social scientists conducted the survey in 1990. All responses came from a representative sample of the urban adult population, ages 18 and older. After deleting missing values, there are a total of 998 respondents in the analysis sample out of 1,000 respondents in the total sample.

A list of 11 value items pertaining to child socialization orientations appeared in the survey. All respondents were asked to choose up to five items from the list as the most important qualities that a child should be encouraged to learn at home.

These items have a number of limitations. First, not all of them are identical to the values examined in previous research. While items such as "independence," "responsibility," "good manners," and "obedience" are related to the autonomy/conformity dimension of value preferences analyzed by Kohn (1977) and Alwin (1984, 1989),

others have rarely been examined up to now. Thus, this study is not a replication; rather, it is an extension of the previous research. Second, compared with previous research on childrearing values, there is a difference in the nature of the data analyzed here. Traditionally, respondents in surveys or interviews were asked to either *rate* or *rank* a set of items pertaining to the characteristics people desire in children. Respondents in WVS were, however, instructed to choose only 5 items from a list of 11 items as important qualities that a child should learn at home. Caution should be used when comparing the findings from this study with that of other studies. Finally, these items reflect general attitudes rather than the standards for behavior adopted by a respondent in childrearing activities. There is a difference between a respondent thinking it is important for a child to have certain qualities and actually emphasizing those qualities in childrearing practice. The present study focuses only on people's general attitudes.

To simplify the interrelationship among a set of value items, measures of childrearing values are usually constructed through a factor analysis of a list of characteristics that people are asked to rate or rank as most/least important traits for children to have. Kohn (1977) and others (Spade 1991) have demonstrated that childrearing values mainly form one value dimension on which autonomy and conformity constitute the two poles.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of data reduction, I also performed an exploratory factor analysis of the 11 items. The results suggest that two distinct substantive factors underlie the data. Table 16.1 presents the factor patterns and loadings from a varimax rotation. The first factor represents a value dimension of autonomy versus conformity in children. It is marked by key items that are representative of the valuation of autonomy and con-

**Table 16.1** Factor patterns and loadings of childrearing values

Value items	Factor 1	Factor 2
Obedience	<u>0.534</u>	-0.175
Hard work	<u>0.518</u>	-0.220
Thrift/saving	<u>0.663</u>	0.068
Independence	-0.366	-0.174
Determination	-0.631	-0.115
Imagination	-0.376	-0.295
Good manners	0.108	-0.660
Unselfishness	-0.115	<u>0.452</u>
Tolerance/respect	0.055	<u>0.666</u>
Responsibility	0.194	<u>0.317</u>
Religious faith	-0.007	0.127
Eigenvalues	1.730	1.413

formity, and these items have high loadings (both positive and negative) on the factor. The valuation of autonomy is made up of three items that have high negative loadings. These items are “independence” ( $r=-0.366$ ), “determination” ( $r=-0.631$ ), and “imagination” ( $r=-0.367$ ). The valuation of conformity is defined by the clustering of items that have high positive loadings on the factor. They are “obedience” ( $r=0.534$ ), “hard work” ( $r=0.518$ ), and “thrift/saving” ( $r=0.663$ ).

The second factor is also marked by two kinds of value items. On the one end, “unselfishness” ( $r=0.452$ ), “tolerance/respect” ( $r=0.666$ ), and “responsibility” ( $r=0.317$ ) register large positive loadings on the factor. On the other end, “good manners” ( $r=-0.660$ ) attain large negative loading. The three positive items appear to represent a caring ethic, a morality that emphasizes the well-being of others. Many feminists argue that women and people in non-Western cultures are more likely than Western men to develop a caring ethic. While it is certainly an interesting topic, the focus of the present research is on the relationship between social class and the valuation of autonomy and conformity in children.

Based on the factor analysis results, two dependent variables are constructed for this research. The first dependent variable is the valuation of autonomy in children. It is created by summing the scores for each respondent based on his or her responses to the value items making up the autonomy value dimension. These value items are

<sup>1</sup> Kohn's factoring procedures generated two factors. While he considered factor 1 indicative of self-direction versus conformity dimension, factor 2 was labeled a maturity dimension. This second factor/dimension was, however, treated very lightly in the book. The primary focus was on the self-direction versus conformity dimension.

“independence,” “imagination,” and “determination.” The second dependent variable, a valuation of conformity, is measured by a scale summing the scores of the values making up the conformity dimension. These values are “obedience,” “hard work,” and “thrift/saving.” Since each of the 11 value items is a dummy variable coded as 1=selected and 0=not selected, the scores of both variables range from 0 to 3. On this scale, high scores indicate an emphasis on the value.<sup>2</sup>

Major independent variables are defined as follows.

### Social Class

Following Wright's (1985) class model, respondents are classified into one of the following five class categories: (1) Administrative cadres are defined as individuals in major decision-making positions. (2) Professional workers are defined as those who possess only skill assets (teachers, accountants, lawyers, and science and technology workers). (3) Supervisors and foremen include administrative personnel and employees who have limited supervising authority. (4) Nonmanual workers are nonsupervisory employees whose work is predominantly white collar, nonmanual in character. (5) Manual workers are nonsupervisory employees whose work is predominantly blue collar, manual in character. Each of the five class locations is coded dichotomously (1=yes and 0=no).

### Education

Past research indicates that the valuation of children's autonomy or conformity is partially a function of one's education. In the WVS, however,

information on respondents' education is inadequate to allow for a straightforward measure of the variable. Regarding education, interviewees were only asked to state the age at which they completed formal education. Ten categories were provided; they range from 1=12 years of age or earlier to 10=21 years of age or older. To measure education, I used the best approximation I could. Specifically, the variable is recoded as 1=less than high school (if a respondent completed formal education at or before the age of 17), 2=high school (if completed education at 18 or 19 years of age), and 3=more than high school (if completed education at 20 years of age or older). Because China has a public education policy and Chinese children of urban families start schooling uniformly at six or seven years of age, I believe this measure is relatively accurate.

### Occupational Autonomy

A key argument in Kohn's class-value thesis is that job characteristics associated with social class explain a large part of the variations in child-rearing values. One such characteristic is the discretionary content or autonomy of the job. This refers to the amount of discretion the person has in a job role. My measure of job autonomy is based on a respondent's self-report on how much decision-making freedom he or she has/had in the job. The response is coded so that a high score on the variable indicates more freedom. The scores of this continuous variable range from 10 (indicating most job freedom) to 1 (representing least job freedom).

### Family Size

Measured by the number of children ever had, this variable is coded as 0=no child, 1=1 child, 2=2 children, 3=3 children, 4=4 children, 5=5 children, and 6=6 children or more.

Two additional variables that require no explanation are gender (1=female and 0=male) and age (in years).

<sup>2</sup>Alternatively, a single value scale can be constructed by adding the factor scores of the value items. This scale would represent the respondent's valuation of autonomy *versus* conformity. My purpose is to examine how autonomy and conformity, as two separate values, are related to social class, but not to make contrast between preferences for autonomy and conformity in children.



# Results

Do childrearing values vary by social class in urban China? For a preliminary answer to the question, I computed means and standard deviations of the two value scales by social class. An analysis of ANOVA indicates that the class differences in the two values are significant. The results are presented in Table 16.2. In terms of the valuation of autonomy, the mean score of foremen/supervisors is significantly lower than that of others, suggesting that they are less likely to value children's autonomy. Manual workers are also less likely to endorse the value than nonmanual workers do. With regard to conformity, foremen/supervisors value it significantly more than members of other classes do. Overall, with the exception of foremen/supervisors, Chinese adults value autonomy more than conformity in children. If we recognize that Confucian values were dominant in Chinese child socialization in the past, the less valuation of children's conformity indicates a remarkable change.

Kohn (1977) has noted that the more advantageous one is in social structure, the more one values autonomy in children. The class differences in values among Chinese adults, however, deviate from this pattern. By all means, Chinese foremen/supervisors are not the least advantaged

group. How can we explain the difference? Could it be related to occupational autonomy? Past research (primarily based on US data) suggests that, due to the amount of control over production assets, skill assets, and the labor power of others, members of different class locations experience different levels of occupational autonomy. And occupational autonomy, in turn, affects people's desire of autonomy or conformity in children. To examine whether social class and occupational autonomy are related, I next computed mean scores of occupational autonomy by social class and the correlations between the five class groups and occupational autonomy. The results are presented in Table 16.3.

Consistent with theoretical argument and empirical findings from previous research, occupational autonomy does vary by class locations in China. Of the five class groups, foremen/supervisors show the highest mean scores on their own occupational autonomy. Their mean score (7.06) is significantly higher than that of cadres (6.05), manual workers (5.25), and nonmanual workers (5.07). This suggests that Chinese foremen/supervisors have more control on their jobs than others do. As a group, foremen and supervisors also display the strongest positive correlation between occupational autonomy and social class (Pearson's  $r=0.23, p<0.001$ ). If we follow conventional arguments, we should find that foremen/supervisors desire autonomy

**Table 16.2** Mean scores and standard deviations<sup>a</sup> of childrearing values by social class<sup>b</sup>

Childrearing values	Social class					F value
	Cadre	Professional	Foreman/supervisor	Nonmanual	Manual	
Autonomy <sup>c</sup>	<i>1.65</i> (0.79)	<i>1.62</i> (0.73)	<u>1.24</u> (0.71)	<i>1.73</i> (0.75)	<i>1.57</i> (0.80)	11.91***
Conformity <sup>d</sup>	<i>1.09</i> (0.73)	<i>1.24</i> (0.75)	<u>1.59</u> (0.71)	<i>1.17</i> (0.77)	<i>1.30</i> (0.83)	11.68***
Number of cases	150	98	202	191	343	

Note: Degree of freedom is 4;  $N=984$

<sup>a</sup>Standard deviations are in parentheses

<sup>b</sup>For each childrearing value, the differences between underlined (foreman/supervisor) and italic entries (other classes) are significant at  $p\leq0.05$

<sup>c</sup>Scores range from 0 to 3; grand mean is 1.55

<sup>d</sup>Scores range from 0 to 3; grand mean is 1.30

\*\*\* $p<0.001$

**Table 16.3** Relationships between social class and occupational autonomy

Social class	Occupational autonomy <sup>a</sup>		
	<i>r</i>	Mean	(SD)
Cadre	0.03	6.05	(2.18)
Professional	0.10**	6.66	(2.06)
Foreman/supervisor	0.23***	7.06	(2.57)
Nonmanual worker	-0.16***	5.07	(2.54)
Manual worker	-0.16***	5.25	(2.73)
Total sample ( <i>N</i> =909)		5.89	(2.62)

<sup>a</sup>Scores range from 0 to 10\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ **Table 16.4** Correlations between occupational autonomy and childrearing values by social class

Occupational autonomy by social class	Childrearing values		
	Autonomy	Conformity	<i>N</i>
Cadre	-0.07	-0.01	149
Professionals	-0.12	0.09	97
Foreman/supervisor	-0.01	-0.20**	194
Nonmanual worker	0.02	0.00	189
Manual workers	0.04	-0.08	277
Total sample	-0.05	-0.03	909

\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ 

most and conformity least. But my finding shows the opposite; Chinese foremen and supervisors value autonomy least and conformity most despite their relatively advantaged class location and the high occupational autonomy they experience at the workplace. Furthermore, Kohn's theory would also lead us to expect nonmanual workers to prefer conformity values most and autonomy values least because, as a group, they have the least amount of job freedom. But the patterns in Table 16.3 show otherwise; Chinese nonmanual workers value autonomy most and conformity least! These findings suggest that occupational autonomy is not the driving force behind the class variations in childrearing values in China.

Table 16.4 further confirms this point. In this table, I display the correlations between occupational autonomy and the valuation of autonomy and conformity by social class. Overall, the associations between occupational autonomy and the two values are very weak, suggesting that the two variables are not closely connected. Thus, Kohn's theory that social class conditions occupational autonomy and occupational autonomy

affects childrearing values is not supported in the Chinese data.

One possible explanation is that the measure in my study does not cover the full range of occupational autonomy. Kohn and his colleagues (Kohn and Schooler 1983; Kohn et al. 1986) measured the occupational autonomy in terms of job complexity, the closeness of supervision, and the routinization of the work flow. Because of the limited information on occupational conditions in the data set used here, I could not replicate all three dimensions associated with the occupational autonomy indexed by Kohn. My measure of occupational autonomy is based on a respondent's freedom in making his/her decisions at work. It reflects the amount of discretion a person has in a job role. Although it is limited in scope, it does indicate how free an individual is to use initiative, thought, and independent judgment in carrying out his or her work. In my analysis, however, decision-making freedom is unrelated to autonomy valuation.

To explore the overall relationship between childrearing orientations and sociodemographic

**Table 16.5** Standardized coefficients from the regression of childrearing values on independent variables

	Childrearing values	
	Autonomy	Conformity
Social class <sup>a</sup>		
Cadre	-0.009 (-0.017)	-0.041 (-0.084)
Professional	0.027 (0.066)	-0.017 (-0.042)
Foreman/supervisor	-0.091 (-0.183)*	0.103 (0.207)**
Nonmanual	0.031 (0.060)	0.007 (0.014)
Education	0.106 (0.096)**	-0.089 (-0.081)*
Age (in years)	-0.174 (-0.010)***	0.167 (0.010)**
Gender (1=female, 0=male)	0.006 (0.010)	-0.029 (-0.046)
Number of children	-0.168 (-0.092)**	0.160 (0.088)**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.148	0.140
Number of cases	887	887

Note: Numbers in parentheses are unstandardized coefficients

<sup>a</sup>Manual worker is the reference category

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

variables, I next regressed the valuation of autonomy and conformity on social class, education, age, gender, and family size. The results are displayed in Table 16.5.

All variables except gender show direct effects on the autonomy and conformity values. The effects of age and education are consistent and strong. In general, older and less-educated Chinese are more likely than young and well-educated Chinese to desire children's conformity. Conversely, the latter are more likely than the former to prefer children's autonomy. Family size affects childrearing values too. The more children one has ever had, the more likely that one values conformity more and independence less. This result supports the theory that suggests that family size can be a structural factor conditioning parent-child relationship. In larger families, maintaining order is more difficult, and parents tend to rely on strong parental control in raising their children.

However, controlling for other factors, foremen/supervisors still value conformity more and autonomy less than manual workers. In an analysis not shown here, I found that foremen/supervisors, as a social group, are in average older and less

educated than others. The regression coefficients suggest that Chinese foremen/supervisors' greater emphasis on conformity and less emphasis on autonomy are not entirely due to their older age and lower educational attainment. This indicates that the class location of foremen/supervisors in China has an independent effect on their childrearing values.

## Discussion and Conclusion

I have found evidence that social class is a source of value variation in urban China. Although the class differences are not very pronounced and not identical to those found in research done on other countries, the value patterns of Chinese foremen/supervisors are remarkably consistent and clear. Compared to other Chinese adults, they are more likely to value conformity and less likely to value autonomy in children. While these differences are moderate in magnitude, they persist despite statistical controls for a host of background factors.

What accounts for the class differences in values? Past research suggests that occupational conditions play a major role in the desirability of

autonomy versus conformity in children; those with greater opportunity to be self-directed at work tend to endorse more autonomy and less conformity than those with little opportunity to be self-directed at the workplace. However, my findings in the Chinese data do not support this explanation; the effect of occupational autonomy on childrearing values is very small and inconsistent. Moreover, Chinese foremen/supervisors in this sample have the greatest perception of freedom of decision making at the workplace, yet they value autonomy the least and conformity the most. These findings suggest that occupational autonomy does not explain the class differences in child socialization values in China. Because of the limitations of the measure of occupational autonomy used in the study, the conclusion I reached here can only be considered tentative.

What then explains the class differences in childrearing values in the Chinese data? Theory and empirical evidence of social mobility in socialist countries provide a plausible explanation. Theoretical discussions of social mobility argue that, in socialist societies, stratification is organized around a command economy rather than a market economy. In a command economy, the dominant political party monopolizes productive activity. Party elites redistribute revenue and income among organizations and individuals. In order to maintain its control and promote discipline within its ranks, the party allocates material and nonmaterial resources to the loyal (Manion 1985; Walder 1985, 1995). Empirical evidence from the studies of social mobility in command economies suggests that, in such societies as China, career advancement depends on educational credentials as well as political loyalty (Liu 2006; Zhou et al. 1996). Although top positions in occupational hierarchy may require both technical training and conformity to party ideology, middle- and lower-rank administrative positions often stress more the ability to follow party orders. Many have documented that local party officials screen candidates for advancement according to political conformity—party membership (Bian 2002; Cao 2001). Due to the limitation of the data, I cannot measure party membership in the present study. But research of

others shows that a considerable proportion of middle-level cadres have party membership (Li and Walder 2001). Since a large number of these individuals may have moved up in their career ladder mainly because of being obedient and loyal to authority, it is quite possible that they value conformity in children to prepare them for occupational upward mobility. In this sense, occupational experiences do influence people's socialization values in China; the political conformity of Chinese foremen/supervisors makes them value children's conformity.

Respondents' age is consistently and strongly related to their preferences of autonomy or conformity in youngsters. The younger one is, the more one prefers autonomy in children. The older one is, the more one values conformity. This age difference in the values may be partly due to a cohort effect. The social and cultural contexts in China have changed significantly during the past several decades. Confucianism has traditionally been most influential in shaping the Chinese culture. Many of Confucian principles that underlie Chinese families are still in effect, especially ones that affect gender roles in rural areas, but its influence on the value and behavior patterns of the urban people in Communist China has declined over time. Most aspects of Confucian teachings were severely denounced during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Furthermore, by the early 1990s, the society had undergone another “revolution”—the economic reform. China's efforts to rebuild its economy and to modernize the nation included activities that promoted ideas and behaviors that were more congruent with Western culture—individualism and capitalism. For example, the government issued many policies to encourage a free market economy where competition is of prime importance. Individual initiatives and success were also encouraged and sometimes even glorified in the mass media. Although Chinese government does not believe that economic development and modernization require Western-style individualism, its many policies and measures emphasizing competition have effectively promoted individualism.

The value items that make up the conformity scale (obedience, hard work, and thrift/savings)

are all qualities emphasized in Confucian teachings. Thus, compared to adults who grew up before the 1960s, adults raised in the 1970s and the 1980s are less likely to embrace the traditional Confucian values. Instead, they are more likely than older Chinese to prize qualities indicative of modernity and individualism (such as independence, determination, and imagination).

Family size is also related to the valuation of autonomy and conformity. Respondents with a large number of children tend to endorse more conformity in children. Conversely, autonomy is preferred more by respondents with no children or only a small number of children. Part of the reason is because family size is associated with respondents' age. Those with a larger number of children tend to be older. Another contributing factor of family size is China's one-child policy. The policy was implemented nationwide in the early 1970s but was enforced more strictly in urban areas. It radically affected the way in which age and family size were interrelated in urban families. Those who were married or had children after that time could have only one child. Thus, age and family size are closely related in this survey. But even after I take the age factor into account, the number of children ever had still exhibits positive effects on conformity values and negative effects on autonomy values. This suggests that family size is a structural factor that has a real and direct impact on childrearing values. In larger families, maintaining order is more difficult, and parents tend to rely on strong parental control in rearing their children. Therefore, parents with many children place a higher value on conformity in their children for the purpose of ensuring household order and manageability. The time, patience, and opportunity to explain rules to children and attend to the internal motivations of each child are probably more available to parents with only one or two children.

Education shows a consistent effect on value orientations. In particular, better-educated Chinese are more likely to desire children's autonomy, whereas less-educated Chinese are more likely to value children's conformity. However, unlike in other studies where the effect of education is the strongest among a host of other variables, the

effect of education observed here is smaller and weaker than that of age and family size. Drawing upon the philosophy of Chinese education and recent discussions of the relationships between education and social mobility in contemporary China, I offer two possible explanations.

First, unlike in the West, where the teaching of knowledge is the primary goal of education, in China, moral development is the focus of formal education. Confucian education, which has dominated Chinese curriculum for more than 2,000 years, considers the cultivation of the person (*xiu shen*) as the top priority in education. A well-known Confucius' saying is "From the emperor to ordinary people, the cultivation of the person is the root" (Confucius 1985, p. 1). The cultivation of the person is understood as forming one's moral character. In Confucian ethics, loyalty (*zhong*) occupies a central place. Historically, loyalty was loyalty to one's parents (filial piety) and to the state (the emperor). Within this tradition, the main goal of education was to produce obedient sons and daughters at home and loyal subjects of the state. People who failed to possess loyalty were characterized as "lacking education (*shao jiao*)."

Although Confucianism was no longer a dominant ideology in China after 1949, the Chinese Communist Party continued placing moral education at the center of educational system. The official slogan of education has been characterized in the order of "moral education, intellectual education, and physical education (*de yu, zhi yu, ti yu*)."

The function of "moral education" is to foster students' moral character, which has been measured by their loyalty to the Party and state. "Intellectual education" refers to the teaching of knowledge. The government has seen it as potentially dangerous because it may encourage independent thinking. Therefore, political campaigns have been launched from time to time in order to make sure that students' loyalty to the state is solidly formed and reinforced under the name of "moral education." Those who failed to be molded by "moral education" have been either purged (e.g., the "anti-rightist movement" in 1957) or kept away from holding key administrative or academic positions (Davis 1992; Walder 1995; Zhou et al. 1996). Within the Chinese political



system, each level of leadership is presumably representing the state, and loyalty to the state usually translates into obedience to authorities at all levels. Thus, in China, historically and today, education has always had a political dimension. It has served as a means for maintaining social order by producing loyal and obedient citizens under the name of "moral education." Although the Chinese educational system has not been always successful in achieving its goals, the importance placed on "moral education" has prohibited to certain degree independent thinking. If this is the case, it is quite possible that in China, levels of education are not as strongly related to independent thinking as it is in the West.

Second, studies of stratification and social mobility in state socialist societies have found that the roles of education in occupational achievement in these societies are quite different from those in market economies. In state socialist societies such as China, although education is an achieved status, it has not been always achieved in a system of meritocracy and it is not consistently related to occupational mobility. During the 50 years of communist rule in China, state policies have changed frequently between competence and political loyalty in criteria for higher education and promotion. For example, during the years of the Cultural Revolution, political loyalty was either the only criterion or the most important criterion for getting into institutions of higher education. Once admitted into colleges or universities, students were judged primarily on their political orientation instead of academic performance. Upon graduation, political loyalty was once again the main criterion for job assignment.

On the other hand, many individuals with solid academic records but who lacked political credentials were denied educational or occupational opportunities. Some were even purged for their independent thinking. Many urban intellectuals and their children were sent to countryside for hard labor in the "anti-rightist" campaign of the late 1950s, because they did not follow state policies obediently and criticized the party. Davis (1992) has also demonstrated occupational downward mobility of the children of the urban intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. Similarly, Walder

(1995) argues that, even in the economic reform era in which educational credentials have become increasingly important in occupational mobility, political credentials are crucial for entry into key administrative positions.

Hence, historically, Chinese education did not emphasize independent thinking. More recently, access to education in China changed constantly due to shifts in state policies, and educational credentials did not have uniform effects on social mobility. Considering these factors, it is not surprising that the impact of education on childrearing orientations is relatively small in the Chinese data.

In sum, I argue that education and occupation do shape childrearing values in urban China. However, because of China's distinctive educational tradition and political system, the role of education in value orientations is smaller and the class disparities differ from those observed in other countries. Furthermore, occupational autonomy is not a driving force behind urban Chinese valuation of autonomy and conformity in children. These findings suggest that structure of childrearing values, as part of psychological consequences of social stratification, does vary by political economic systems.

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# Support and Care for Aging Chinese: A Comparison of Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Taipei

# 17

Daniel W.L. Lai

Population aging is a growing trend in Asian countries with an increasing number of people that are entering old age. In this context, the importance of studying support and care by family to the elderly population is understandable. Research findings and literature have consistently indicated the importance of family support and care to the positive health and well-being of elderly people (Lowenstein and Daatland 2006; North et al. 2008; Robertson et al. 2007). In the context of Chinese culture, family care and support are particularly essential since it is the traditional Chinese culture that places much emphasis on providing care and support to elderly people. Therefore, understanding social support and care arrangement within the context of the Chinese culture is particularly important due to the fact that Chinese tradition and culture often places strong emphasis on respecting and valuing the contributions of elders and older adults. To provide informal care for elderly Chinese means to provide them with security, quality, and humanity. However, changes in family structures and values associated with economic growth and Westernization, the rise of nuclear families, and the increasingly strong emphasis on productivity, technological advancement, and competitiveness

all form major challenges to the values, contributions, and social status of the aging population in traditional Chinese culture (Chao and Roth 2000; Chiou et al. 2005; Holroyd 2001; Zhan 2004; Zhan and Montgomery 2003). As indicated by some researchers, the societal values toward older people in Chinese culture appear to be changing (Chiu and Yu 2001). It is not surprising that the care and support for older people in Chinese societies also diminish. This current study aimed to examine this issue on a wider scale by including a much larger sample from the aging Chinese from different locations to compare the family support and care received by the elderly Chinese.

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## Literature Review

### Family Care and Support for Elderly People

A family or informal caregiver is an individual who provides care, support, or assistance, beyond what is required as a normal part of everyday life, to a family member, friend, or neighbor who has a physical or mental disability, or who is frail or chronically ill (Health Canada 2004; Walker et al. 1995). Family support and care mitigate many negative factors in elderly people's lives, such as illness or disability, or emotional loss (Zheng and Hart 2002). It is found that family social support is strongly associated with happiness, signifying that family relationships play a pivotal role in quality of life (North et al. 2008). Society today

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is shifting away from formal institutional care and creating an increased demand for family or informal caregiving (Health Canada 2004). Family caregiving is an inexpensive alternative to long-term care institutions. Informal caregiving plays a critical role in the sustainability of communities (Health Canada 2004).

Family care and support is seen as an important determinant of psychological well-being among older people in both Western and Chinese societies (Antonucci et al. 1996; Chi and Choi 2001; Chou and Chi 2004; Consedine et al. 2004; Cummings 2003; George 2005; Kahn et al. 2003; Minnes and Woodford 2005; Siebert et al. 1999; Siu and Phillips 2002; Wong et al. 2007). Family support influences an elderly person's quality of life, and those who have supportive social networks have better physical and mental health than older people who do not have meaningful ties with others (Bajekal et al. 2004; Bosworth and Schaie 1997; Carstensen 1991; Smith et al. 2004). It was found that the size of the supporting network has a great impact on the frequency or the quality of the support received (Philips et al. 2008). The perceived availability of support greatly enhances feelings of independence among support recipients and thereby their quality of life (Krause 2001). Older persons should be encouraged and persuaded to maintain their support networks and to increase the size of these networks in order to effectively produce a good quality of life (Philips et al. 2008). This can be achieved by keeping within a close proximity of friends and family (Philips et al. 2008). Along with good physical health, good psychological health can be enhanced by different members of someone's support network (Philips et al. 2008). However, it is found that family members contribute the most valued and best type of support compared to other social network members (Chou and Chi 2001; Siu and Phillips 2002; Philips et al. 2008).

### Population Aging and Family Care for Elderly Chinese

Population aging in Asia is increasing at an unprecedented speed, bringing about great social and economic changes along with it (Chan 2005).

Specifically, the elderly Chinese population is growing in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan (Chen 2007). However, when compared with Western governments, the governments in these regions may not be as prepared for population aging (Chan 2005). Traditionally, Asian and Chinese cultures have always relied upon family-based support systems for the elderly, but the increase of the elderly population has brought about anxiety because of the stress that this will cause these family systems (Chan 2005). Because formal support for elderly Asians is scarce and has very low coverage in Asian countries, Chinese families have always played a major role in supporting their elderly, and they continue to do so (Chan 2005). The traditional values of filial piety and familial obligation are reasons for family support and caregiving in the Chinese culture (Holroyd 2001, 2003; Wong and Chau 2006). To provide informal care for elderly Chinese means to provide them with security, quality, and humanity (Chen 2007).

The Chinese culture, like many other cultures, such as Latino (Delgadillo et al. 2004), South Asian (Gupta and Pillai 2000), and Korean (Levande et al. 2000; Sung 2002), places very strong emphasis on family values and cohesiveness. As the traditional virtue, *filial piety* is highly regarded in the Chinese culture. It defines how elders should be respected and taken care of by the younger generations. Three major conditions for filial piety include respecting one's parents, not bringing dishonor to parents, and taking good care of parents (Wing 1995). The younger generation of Chinese continues to interact with their elders in China under the influence of filial piety (Chow 2001; Ng et al. 2002; Zhan and Montgomery 2003).

While filial piety is an important factor contributing towards care and support giving (Ho 1996; Hashimoto and Ikels 2005), older Chinese persons do not rely solely upon their relatives or family members for support and care. Along with filial piety, respect is also an important predictor of psychological well-being (Cheng and Chan 2006). The attitude toward and manifestations of filial obligation have been changing (Chow 2001; Delgado and Tennstedt 1997) as many structural circumstances such as family structure, living environment, housing, employment, and

economy often do not allow traditional filial piety to be nurtured.

For example, a study by Lam and Boey (2005) found that Chinese elderly who live in Hong Kong are at risk of suffering from poor mental health status because of their deprived social conditions, which was directly correlated with the status of family support. Because Chinese elderly often want to avoid seeking help or assistance for fear of being stigmatized, this may contribute to the risk of mental health problems by introducing more stress into their lives (Lam and Boey 2005). In Taiwan, a study on successful aging (Hui-Chuan 2007) revealed that family and social support, living with family, and receiving emotional care were all highly rated successful aging concepts. This stipulates that elderly Chinese people place great importance on family support and their surrounding social environment (Hui-Chuan 2007). Literature on Chinese familial support and caregiving reveals that when proper care and support is received, it has a positive effect on the well-being of the Chinese elderly (Baorong et al. 2007; Holroyd 2001, 2003; Hui-Chuan 2007; Wong and Chau 2006; Zheng and Hart 2002).

Most of the previous studies on family support and care for elderly Chinese took place in one location. Very few empirical studies can be found that compare support and care for the elderly Chinese population in different sociocultural contexts. This current study focused on the support and care received by elderly Chinese in three major Chinese societies in Asia, including Guangzhou in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taipei in Taiwan. A particular interest for this study is related to the fact that Chinese tradition and culture often place strong emphasis on respecting and caring for elderly people, so understanding the support and care that elderly people receive in these contemporary Chinese societies is an avenue for understanding how societal and familial values toward providing care to the aging population have evolved in the modern world.

Despite the growth of the aging population in Chinese societies, very little is known about the intragroup differences in family care and support within the Chinese cultural context. Previous research findings have focused primarily on health

problems and adjustment issues of the aging population (Evashwick and Ory 2005; Gordon 2001; LaBauve and Robinson 1999), without attending to the needs for support and care by the elderly Chinese, probably due to the prevailing myth that all Chinese elderly people are “well taken care” of by their family as a result of the traditional cultural values and beliefs. Another important reason to examine support and care is that these are the essential foundations for the health and well-being of the elderly people, as indicated in previous research findings. However, with social changes and associated changes in socioeconomic structures (Keng-mun and Kwok 2004, 2005; Yan 2006), the traditional value of family care and support, even within the Chinese culture, may have changed. Understanding the family support and care received by the elderly Chinese in different locations serves to identify the variation in sociocultural context and its potential effect on the elderly Chinese.

This comparative study on the support and care elderly Chinese receive is aimed at answering two research questions: (1) What are the levels of support and care received by the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Taipei? and (2) How does the support and care received differ for the elderly Chinese in these three locations?

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## Method

The data for this study were collected in a larger cross-sectional survey on aging Chinese 55 years and older in three Chinese communities of Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Taipei, with the original objective of examining the health and well-being of aging Chinese in three different Chinese societies in Asia. For the purpose of this current study, secondary data analysis was used.

## Sampling

The target population of the original study was the older Chinese 55 years and older in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Taipei. Different sampling strategies were used to obtain the sam-



ple in the original study since there were variations in social and economic circumstances of the aging people in these three cities.

In Guangzhou, the sample was obtained using a purposive nonprobability sampling strategy in which university student interviewers from the social science disciplines approached potentially eligible participants in five of the eight major residential districts in Guangzhou. Those who were approached were explained the purpose of the research study. For those who met the age criteria of being 55 years and older, they were invited to take part in a face-to-face interview by answering a structured questionnaire. The census information on gender and age distribution of the 55 years and older population in Guangzhou was used as the basis for sample selection so that the same age and gender distribution was obtained in the resulting sample. The five residential districts included in this study represented neighborhoods with a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Using this sampling method, a total of 728 eligible participants were approached, and a total of 500 older Chinese 55 years and older completed the study, representing a response rate of 68.7%.

For the sample from Hong Kong, a stratified proportional random sampling strategy was used, composed of older Chinese who were 55 years and older. The sampling frame was based on the local telephone directory. Eligible participants were identified through telephone calls made to randomly selected telephone numbers identified from the local telephone directory. The sample was stratified according to the population distribution in the location of residency, age, and gender of the target population reported in the 2001 census (Census and Statistics Department 2001). The three major regions of Hong Kong—Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and New Territories—were represented, accounting for 99.9% of all eligible participants 55 years and older (1,249,094). Eligible participants were invited to complete a telephone survey. As a result, a total of 2,324 eligible participants were identified through telephone screening, and 504 participants successfully completed the telephone survey, representing a success rate of 21.7%. The

low success rate is most probably due to the skeptical attitudes that are held by many older people in Hong Kong, who are suspicious of solicitation by strangers due to anxiety about becoming a victim of scams or commercial frauds.

The sample from Taipei was obtained using a similar sampling method used in Hong Kong. The local telephone directory was used as the sampling frame. Listed telephone numbers were randomly selected. Telephone screening contacts were made to the randomly selected numbers to identify eligible participants who were 55 years and older. The eligible participants were then invited to take part in a telephone interview to complete a structured questionnaire. The sample selection was stratified according to the census information on age and gender distribution of the population 55 years and older in Taipei. As a result, a total of 5,580 telephone numbers were screened, and among them, 786 eligible participants who met the selection criteria were identified. Out of these 786 eligible participants, 500 participants completed the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 63.6%. Although the original study consisted of participants 55 years of age and older, for the purpose of this current study, only individuals who were 65 years and older in the original data set were included in the analysis.

## Data Collection and Measures

Trained interviewers who were local graduate students in social science disciplines in each data collection site were hired to conduct the interviews. In Hong Kong and Taipei, data collection was conducted using telephone interviews. In Guangzhou, face-to-face interviews were used. Data collection took place between November 2002 and January 2003.

The same structured questionnaire was used for the data collection tool in all three cities. Depending on the location of the study, the interviews were conducted mainly in either Cantonese or Putonghua (Mandarin), the most commonly used dialects by the Chinese in these three cities. The questionnaire consisted of questions with a

wide range of topics, including demographic information, psychosocial backgrounds, and health status. In this study, only variables on attitude toward aging and a few sociodemographic and health variables were included in the analyses. However, for the purpose of this current study, only data from variables related to support and care were included in the analysis.

Support and care were the key variables examined in this study. As indicated in the previous literature review, support for elderly people can be manifested through various methods including financial support, emotional support, or support through providing companionship. In this study, social support was measured by several questions asking the participants whether they had a confidant and whether they would have someone to provide care for them if they were ill or disabled. The answers to both questions were grouped into either yes or no, with a score of one assigned to yes and a score of zero assigned to no. The participants were also asked to indicate the frequency of talking to friends, relatives, or others on the telephone and the frequency of spending time with someone not living with them within the past week. The answers were grouped as "not at all," "once," "2–6 times," and "once a day or more." Another question was used to ask the frequency that the participant felt lonely, with the answers grouped as "quite often," "sometimes," and "almost never." Finally, the participants were also asked whether they saw their relatives as often as they wanted, with the answers grouped as "as often as I want to" and "somewhat unhappy about how little."

The living arrangements of the participants probably indicate the availability of family support and were measured by asking the participants to indicate whether they resided alone or were living with someone else. The participants were given a list to indicate the nature of the relationship with the people that they lived with.

Types of assistance or care received in Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) were measured by asking the participants to indicate whether they would need help from a list of four ADL and eight IADL items (Ikegami 1995). The ADL and IADL included bathing/showering, grooming,

eating/feeding, using the toilet, light household chores, heavy household chores, house maintenance, transportation, shopping, meal preparation, personal business affairs, and using the telephone. At the same time, for the participants who indicated needing help in an ADL or IADL item, they were further asked to indicate whether they had someone to help them.

Source of income was one measure of financial support as it would indicate the source or people that support the financial needs of the elderly Chinese. In the original study, the participants were asked to self-identify the sources of their income with a list of potential sources including "son/daughter in the household," "son/daughter not in the household," "daughter-in-law/son-in-law in the household," "daughter-in-law/son-in-law not in the household," "earnings from work," "retirement pension," "personal savings," "investment," "Comprehensive Social Security (for the Hong Kong participants only)," "Old Age Allowance (for the Hong Kong participants only)," and "other source of income."

The sociodemographic variables included in this study were age, gender, marital status, education level, self-rated financial adequacy, and employment status. Age was measured by the chronological age of the participants. Gender of the participants was grouped as either male or female. Marital status of the participants was grouped as either married or unmarried, which included single, divorced, separated, or widowed. Education level was grouped as no formal education, primary education, secondary education, and postsecondary and above. Because of the differences in income standard and the cost of living across the data collection sites, self-rated financial adequacy was used to represent the financial status of the participants. It was measured by a question asking the participants to rate their level of adequacy in the financial resources along an ordinal four-point Likert scale between "very inadequate" (score of 1) and "very well" (score of 4). Employment status of the participants was measured by a question asking the participants to self-report their current employment status from the choice of "not working," "working part time," and "working full time."

Health status of the elderly people affects the amount of support and care required (Glaser et al. 2008). Therefore, in this study, variables on physical health and mental health of the elderly Chinese were included to indicate their potential health needs. In the original study, physical health and mental health were measured by a Chinese version of the Medical Outcomes Study 36-item Short Form (SF-36) (Ren et al. 1998). The SF-36 is a standardized health assessment instrument (Ware et al. 1994) used in health research on people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ware and Gandek 1998; Ware and Kosinski 2001; Ware et al. 1998; Ware and Sherbourne 1992). The validated Chinese version of the scale (Ren et al. 1998; Ren and Chang 1998) was used to measure the physical and mental health of the participants. This 36-item scale yielded two-dimensional scores, PCS (Physical Component Summary) and MCS (Mental Component Summary), representing the physical and mental health. A higher score meant a better health status in each domain.

Data Analysis

The demographic characteristics of the elderly Chinese involved in this study were analyzed

using descriptive statistics including frequency distribution and mean scores. Bivariate statistics including Chi-square and one-way analysis of variance were used to compare the differences in the support and care variables among the elderly Chinese in the three locations.

Results

The demographic characteristics of the elderly Chinese included in this study are presented in Table 17.1. The age and gender distributions of the participants in each city matched those reported in the local censuses. The findings showed that significant differences were reported in most of the demographic characteristics among the elderly Chinese participants in the three cities, except for age and gender distribution. As indicated in Table 17.1, fewer elderly Chinese in Hong Kong were married when compared with the elderly Chinese in the other two cities. Elderly Chinese in Guangzhou reported the highest proportion of postsecondary and above education level. The elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported the lowest level of self-rated financial adequacy when compared with the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and Taipei. On the other hand, in

Table 17.1 Sociodemographic characteristics and health status of the participants

	All cases ( <i>n</i> = 891)	Guangzhou ( <i>n</i> = 278)	Hong Kong ( <i>n</i> = 304)	Taipei ( <i>n</i> = 309)	Test statistics
Age (mean, sd)	73.0 (6.0)	72.5 (6.1)	72.8 (5.8)	73.5 (6.0)	<i>F</i> = 2.0
Being male (%)	50.1	52.5	46.4	51.5	$\chi^2$ = 2.6
Being married (%)	65.3	79.9	54.3	63.1	$\chi^2$ = 43.0 <sup>a</sup>
Education (%)					
No formal education	25.2	18.2	32.5	24.2	$\chi^2$ = 72.2 <sup>a</sup>
Primary	33.2	21.2	40.1	37.4	
Secondary	29.0	40.5	21.9	25.6	
Post sec. and above	12.6	20.1	5.6	12.8	
Self-rated financial adequacy (mean, sd)	2.6 (.6)	2.6 (.7)	2.5 (.5)	2.8 (.6)	<i>F</i> = 16.3 <sup>a</sup>
Employment status (%)					
Not working	96.4	99.3	97.7	92.6	$\chi^2$ = 23.3 <sup>a</sup>
Working full time	2.7	0.4	1.3	6.1	
Working part time	0.9	0.4	1.0	1.3	
Physical health (PCS) (mean, sd)	45.3 (9.9)	45.2 (9.3)	44.5 (9.3)	46.1 (11.1)	<i>F</i> = 2.0
Mental health (MCS) (mean, sd)	50.9 (8.9)	50.8 (8.7)	52.5 (8.7)	49.4 (9.0)	<i>F</i> = 9.8 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*p* < 0.001

**Table 17.2** Living arrangement of the participants in the three locations

	All cases <i>n</i> = 891	Guangzhou <i>n</i> = 278	Hong Kong <i>n</i> = 304	Taipei <i>n</i> = 309	Test statistics
Living alone	12.1	6.8	23.7	5.5	$\chi^2 = 58.2^a$
Living with husband	22.9	29.5	16.4	23.3	$\chi^2 = 14.1^b$
Living with wife	38.6	45.3	30.9	40.1	$\chi^2 = 13.2^b$
Living with sibling(s)	0.7	0.4	0.7	1.0	$\chi^2 = 0.82^{ns}$
Living with son(s)	48.3	49.6	37.5	57.6	$\chi^2 = 25.1^a$
Living with daughter(s)	19.8	18.0	22.0	19.1	$\chi^2 = 1.6^{ns}$
Living with son(s)-in-law	3.8	6.5	2.3	2.9	$\chi^2 = 7.9^c$
Living with daughter(s)-in-law	30.8	33.1	12.2	46.9	$\chi^2 = 88.0^a$
Living with grandchildren	34.5	38.5	15.8	49.2	$\chi^2 = 78.6^a$
Living with other relatives	2.8	4.7	0.3	3.6	$\chi^2 = 11.0^b$
Living with friends	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.0	$\chi^2 = 2.2^{ns}$
Living with others	3.7	4.3	4.6	2.3	$\chi^2 = 2.8^{ns}$

<sup>a</sup> $p < 0.001$ ; <sup>b</sup> $p < 0.01$ ; <sup>c</sup> $p < 0.05$ ; *ns* not significant

terms of employment status, the elderly Chinese in Taipei were most involved in employment as the percentage of participants working either full time or part time was the highest among the elderly Chinese in the three locations.

Table 17.1 also presents findings on the health status of the elderly Chinese in the three cities. No significant difference was reported in the physical health status of the elderly Chinese among the three locations. However, the elderly Chinese in Taipei and Guangzhou reported a slightly poorer mental health status than the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong.

Table 17.2 presents the findings on the source of income and financial support of the elderly Chinese included in this study. However, as the source of income and financial support question was not asked in the data collection with the participants in Taipei, only findings on the participants in Guangzhou and Hong Kong are presented. As indicated in the findings, significant differences were reported in the source of income reported by the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. More of the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou received retirement pension than the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong. On the other hand, more of the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong received income from sons or daughters in the household as well as sons and daughters not in the household than the elderly Chinese in

Guangzhou. A very slightly higher percentage of the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported earnings from work than the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou. Personal savings were not a major source of income for the elderly Chinese in this study. However, a slightly higher percentage of the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported receiving income through personal savings than the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou.

Living arrangements of the elderly Chinese reflects the support that they might be able to receive. The findings on living arrangements are presented in Table 17.3. The elderly Chinese in Hong Kong were most likely to live alone than the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and Taipei, indicating the potential loneliness that elderly Chinese in Hong Kong face. More of the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou lived with a husband or a wife when compared with the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong and Taipei. Particularly, the percentage of participants that reported living with a husband was lowest for the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong, indicating the fact that most of the elderly women in Hong Kong were not married or likely to be widowed.

The traditional Chinese value of living with the son was highly prevalent in Taipei, with over half of the elderly Chinese in Taipei living with their son(s). The elderly Chinese in Guangzhou were more likely to live with their son(s)-in-law.

**Table 17.3** Financial support for the participants in Guangzhou and Hong Kong

	All cases <i>n</i> = 891	Guangzhou <i>n</i> = 278	Hong Kong <i>n</i> = 304	Test statistics
Son/daughter in the household	15.7	12.2	34.9	$\chi^2 = 144.4^a$
Son/daughter not in the household	9.0	9.0	18.1	$\chi^2 = 61.4^a$
Daughter-in-law/son-in-law in the household	1.2	1.8	2.0	$\chi^2 = 6.0^{ns}$
Daughter-in-law/son-in-law not in the household	0.6	1.8	0.0	$\chi^2 = 11.1^b$
Earnings from work	1.9	2.9	3.0	$\chi^2 = 9.2^c$
Retirement pension	31.1	90.6	8.2	$\chi^2 = 673.9^a$
Personal savings	5.1	6.8	8.6	$\chi^2 = 26.1^a$
Investment (e.g., rent, interests, mutual funds, stocks, real estates)	0.6	1.8	0.0	$\chi^2 = 11.1^b$
Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (Hong Kong only)	NA	NA	11.8	NA
Old Age Allowance (Hong Kong only)	NA	NA	58.6	NA
Other source of income	2.2	2.5	4.3	$\chi^2 = 10.3^b$

<sup>a</sup>*p* < 0.001; <sup>b</sup>*p* < 0.01; <sup>c</sup>*p* < 0.05; *ns* not significant

On the other hand, the elderly Chinese in Taipei were most likely to live with their daughter(s)-in-law. Intergenerational households were most common in Taipei, with close to half of the elderly Chinese there living with grandchildren. The percentage in Hong Kong was lowest among the three locations. No significant difference was reported in the proportion of elderly Chinese living with daughters in the three locations. No difference was reported too in terms of living with sibling(s), friend(s), or other(s).

Table 17.4 reports the results of the social support items used in this study. The findings indicated that the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong tended to report the lowest level of social support as indicated through most of the social support items. Specifically, much fewer elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported talking to friends, relatives, or others on the telephone once a day than the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and Taipei. Much fewer elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported to spend time with someone they do not live with than the elderly Chinese in the two other locations. Over a third of the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported not having someone they can trust and confide in while the percentages were only 23.4% for the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and 14.5% for the elderly in Taipei.

When asked whether the participants would have someone to give them help if they were sick or disabled, almost all of the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and Taipei reported a positive answer while only about three quarters of the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported a “yes” answer. In terms of frequency of seeing relatives and friends, among the three groups, the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong were the unhappiest group because of how little they could see their relatives and friends. However, despite the findings above on the low social support level reported by the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong, they were most likely to report almost never feeling lonely when compared with the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and Taipei.

Findings on assistance needed and received by the elderly Chinese in ADL and IADL are reported in Table 17.5. Heavy household chores, house maintenance, and light household chores were the three areas that required the most assistance by the elderly Chinese in all three locations. The elderly Chinese in Hong Kong reported a higher level of need in light household chores than the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou and Taipei. However, the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou reported a higher need in heavy household chores and house maintenance than the elderly Chinese



**Table 17.4** Comparison of social support items of the three locations

	All cases	Guangzhou	Hong Kong	Taipei	Test statistics
Talk to friends, relatives, or others on the telephone					
Not at all	21.9	20.7	20.5	24.3	$\chi^2 = 46.9^a$
Once	23.7	21.4	24.2	25.3	
2–6 times	21.5	24.4	30.8	9.7	
Once a day or more	32.9	33.6	24.5	40.7	
Spent time with someone who does not live with you					
Not at all	32.6	34.3	33.9	29.8	$\chi^2 = 37.3^a$
Once	44.7	36.9	47.8	48.3	
2–6 times	9.6	14.2	11.3	4.0	
Once a day or more	13.1	14.6	7.0	17.9	
Have someone you can trust and confide in					
No	25.2	23.4	37.5	14.5	$\chi^2 = 46.6^a$
Yes	68.2	71.8	54.6	78.4	
Don't know	6.6	4.8	7.8	7.1	
Have someone give you help if sick or disabled					
No	9.8	2.6	23.4	3.7	$\chi^2 = 86.0^a$
Yes	90.2	97.4	76.6	96.3	
Feeling lonely					
Quite often	6.3	6.3	4.7	7.5	$\chi^2 = 21.7^a$
Sometimes	30.1	29.8	21.3	37.6	
Almost never	63.7	64.0	73.9	54.9	
See your relatives and friends as often as you want					
As often as want to	78.7	81.7	64.3	87.6	$\chi^2 = 41.7^a$
Somewhat unhappy about how little	21.3	18.3	35.7	12.4	

<sup>a</sup> $p < 0.001$ 

in Hong Kong and Taipei. When comparing the elderly Chinese in all three locations, those in Guangzhou consistently reported a higher level of need for assistance in bathing/showering, grooming, eating/feeding, using the toilet, transportation, and using the telephone. On the other hand, among those who needed help in the ADL and IADL, more of the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou consistently reported not having someone to help in all the items than the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong and Taipei.

The findings in Table 17.5 also indicated the gaps in assistance and care required by the elderly Chinese. For the elderly Chinese in Guangzhou, the largest gap existed in the personal care items (i.e., ADL) such as eating/feeding, using the toilet, and grooming. For the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong, the widest gaps occurred with the IADL needs related to using the telephone and

transportation. For the elderly Chinese in Taipei, the major gaps existed in using the telephone and bathing/showering.

## Discussion

Despite the relatively large sample size used in this study, a few limitations of the study should be noted. Caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings. The first issue is related to sampling. The sample from Guangzhou was not randomly selected and was only obtained from a few selected neighborhoods. This sample in China was not likely to be representative of the general elderly population in Guangzhou. As only the sample from Guangzhou was included, the findings cannot be generalized to the elderly Chinese in other cities or locations in China. For

**Table 17.5** Comparison of assistance received in ADL and IADL in three locations

	All cases	Guangzhou	Hong Kong	Taipei	Test statistics
Bathing/Showering					
Needed help	5.1	9.4	2.3	3.9	$\chi^2 = 16.4^a$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	68.9	50.0	100	91.7	$\chi^2 = 10.4^c$
Grooming					
Needed help	3.7	6.1	2.0	3.2	$\chi^2 = 7.3^d$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	63.6	29.4	100	100	$\chi^2 = 17.7^a$
Eating/Feeding					
Needed help	3.3	6.1	1.0	2.9	$\chi^2 = 12.3^c$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	55.2	23.5	100	100	$\chi^2 = 16.6^a$
Using the toilet					
Needed help	3.5	6.1	1.3	3.2	$\chi^2 = 10.0^c$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	61.3	29.4	100	100	$\chi^2 = 16.1^a$
Light household chores					
Needed help	24.1	20.9	37.8	13.6	$\chi^2 = 51.5^a$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	88.8	67.2	96.5	97.6	$\chi^2 = 37.4^a$
Heavy household chores					
Needed help	49.8	59.7	49.0	41.7	$\chi^2 = 19.0^a$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	91.7	83.1	96.0	97.7	$\chi^2 = 25.5^a$
House maintenance					
Needed help	49.7	70.1	46.4	34.6	$\chi^2 = 75.9^a$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	91.9	87.7	95.0	95.3	$\chi^2 = 8.2^d$
Transportation					
Needed help	13.1	16.9	8.2	14.6	$\chi^2 = 10.4^c$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	81.2	61.7	92.0	95.6	$\chi^2 = 19.7^a$
Shopping					
Needed help	19.2	21.6	22.0	14.2	$\chi^2 = 7.5^d$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	87.7	73.3	97.9	93.2	$\chi^2 = 18.1^a$
Meal preparation					
Needed help	23.0	26.3	25.3	17.8	$\chi^2 = 7.3^d$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	85.9	68.5	96.1	94.5	$\chi^2 = 28.2^a$
Personal business affairs					
Needed help	16.0	17.6	9.9	20.7	$\chi^2 = 14.1^c$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	83.9	61.2	96.7	95.3	$\chi^2 = 28.5^a$
Using the telephone					
Needed help	8.0	12.2	2.0	10.0	$\chi^2 = 23.6^a$
<sup>b</sup> Having someone to help	69.0	50.0	83.3	87.1	$\chi^2 = 11.1^c$

<sup>a</sup> $p < 0.001$ <sup>b</sup>Among those who needed help<sup>c</sup> $p < 0.01$ <sup>d</sup> $p < 0.05$ 

the sample from Hong Kong, a relatively low response rate was reported, indicating the potential bias associated with the respondents included in the study. The extent to which the existing sample from Hong Kong was representative of those who refused to take part in the study was

not known. For the sample from Taipei, the response rate was only moderate. As the sample was only obtained from the largest and most prosperous city in Taiwan, the data collected were unlikely to represent the elderly people in other smaller cities, towns, and rural areas in Taiwan.

The second limitation is related to the data collection method used. In Taipei and Hong Kong, the telephone survey was used, while in Guangzhou, the face-to-face interview method was used. The variation in data collection method might have some unknown effects on the results obtained. In addition, the use of the telephone survey in Taipei and Hong Kong might have excluded those who did not have a telephone at home, those who were not home during the calls, those who had unlisted telephone numbers, and those who chose not to answer unsolicited telephone calls.

The third limitation was related to the measurements of family support and care. As indicated in the method section, data on financial support were not collected from the participants in Taipei. On the other hand, the variation in the retirement and social welfare systems among the three locations has made the comparison of financial support difficult. In addition, variables measuring family support and care were predetermined in the original study. The measurements used did not address family support and care comprehensively. For instance, the instrument support was only measured according to the ADL and IADL needs. Other forms of instrumental support that are unrelated to health functioning were not examined. The variables used to measure emotional support also appeared to be touching the surface and did not provide the in-depth details of the specific support received in the emotional or psychological domain. Family networks were only measured by living arrangements. Details about the intensity and frequency of family contacts with different family members and other social support networks were not included in the study. Furthermore, the nature and quality of the relationship between the elderly Chinese and their family members and relatives were not examined.

Finally, when measuring family care and support, data were only collected from the older adults but not from the family members or relatives. Therefore, the amount and types of family care and support reported from this single perspective should be interpreted with caution.

Despite the methodological limitations, the findings have illustrated the general differences in family care and support received by the elderly Chinese in the three locations. As indicated in the results, the elderly Chinese in Hong Kong appeared to have received the least family or social support and care. Specifically, they have fewer interactions in their social support networks, as more of them lived alone and did not have someone to confide in. One probable reason for these findings is that more older people in Hong Kong were “not married” when compared with the older people in the other two locations.

The older adults in Hong Kong did not see their friends or family very often, when compared to the other two cities. However, a higher percentage reported to receive income contributions from their children, reflecting the financial support they have received, which may have balanced out the negative feeling of loneliness that they have experienced (Zhen 2008).

The older adults in Hong Kong were less likely to receive income from retirement, reflecting the financial problems this group of older adults may be faced with. With unstable retirement income, the older adults in Hong Kong could be more financially vulnerable. However, the findings indicate that the financial vulnerability is likely to be compensated by the financial support received from their children.

In Guangzhou, the elderly Chinese there reported the highest level of education compared to Hong Kong and Taipei, and the best mental health status of the three cities. This may be attributed to the fact that a great part of their source of income was retirement pension, thereby alleviating any pressure to work and to earn an income to support themselves (Cooke 2006; Tracy 1993). This finding can also confirm previous research findings that a stable income is beneficial to the older adults not just financially but also psychologically (Ochocka et al. 2006).

The greatest percentage of participants from Taipei were working either full time or part time. While it may be encouraging to have aging adults continue to be involved in the labor market, the finding also reflects the financial needs of the

aging adults in Taipei. This may attribute to their slightly poorer mental health status when compared to the health status of those in Guangzhou. Those who work have more stress and less time for social interactions with others, which can result in a poorer mental health status, and this includes the elderly (Lamberg 2004; Porter 2001; Ozawa and Lum 2005). Also, the quality of family relationships and social relationships may degrade over time due to work (Crouter et al. 2001), also accounting for the poorer mental health status of those in Taipei. In the city of Taipei, the elderly were most likely to live with their family, such as their sons- and daughters-in-law, attributing to a lesser degree of loneliness and more social support and care.

Although caring for and providing assistance to aging parents or elders in the family are often considered traditional familial obligations, the changes in social and economic structure in the different Chinese societies have posed challenges for this cultural norm to prevail (Fong 1973). The younger generations face multiple demands and may not be able to provide adequate tangible care and assistance (Zsembik and Bonilla 2000). The findings in this study have indicated that when compared with the older people in Hong Kong and Taipei, more of the older people in Guangzhou did not receive the assistance they needed in ADL and IADL tasks. This is probably due to the lack of well-established and systematic home support services or programs for older people in mainland China. At the same time, the development history of the home care programs and services in Hong Kong has been lengthy (Chau-Kiu and Raymond 2005). In recent years, home care programs in Taiwan have also grown (Chou et al. 2008). The use of privately hired foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong and Taiwan has also been more proper than in Mainland China (Lau and Chiu 2004). All these are probably the reasons for the better fulfillment of caring of the aging people in these two jurisdictions.

Both in Guangzhou and Taipei, most of the elderly had someone to trust and confide in and had someone to take care of them if they happened to be or disabled and saw their friends or family quite often, meaning that they had a higher

level of social support compared to those in Hong Kong. One potential reason for this finding is that many of the older adults in Hong Kong are long-term immigrants from mainland China. Although they have spent an extended period of time in Hong Kong, their major social support networks, such as family members and relatives, could remain in their homeland. Therefore, as they grow older, the reliance on support and care by these support networks that are not close in distance may pose a challenge for the aging Chinese in Hong Kong. On the other hand, the highly stressful living environment, the major gap between the wealthy and the poor, and the high cost of living could also be the reasons for many older people in Hong Kong being less likely to receive the social support and care they would like to have. For many aging people in Hong Kong, their children are probably encountering major life stress due to costs of living, various forms of employment demands, and other problems due to intensive urbanization. All these are factors that may reduce the social support and care that the older adults could receive from the younger generation. As higher levels of social support correlate with better mental health and lesser feelings of loneliness, and can prevent or alleviate depression (Westaway et al. 2005), this further explains the reason for the aging Chinese in Hong Kong reporting the less favorable mental health status among the older adults in the three locations.

To conclude, the findings in this multisite international comparative study have indicated that not all aging Chinese are the same. Despite the strong beliefs and values in familial care and support in the Chinese culture, the socioeconomic and policy level differences among Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Taipei are likely to play a role in accounting for the differences in support and care reported by the aging Chinese in these three locations. The findings further confirm how differences in the level of support and care received have affected the mental health and well-being of the older Chinese. From the policy perspective, support and care for the aging population in Chinese societies can no longer rely solely on the traditional familial care. Social

changes may lead to familial roles that are not easily fulfilled. On the other hand, the lack of organized programs and services may result in social support and care not being adequate, resulting in further suffering of the aging adults. Therefore, for an aging society, in order to fulfill the social support and caring needs of the aging population, policies and programs have to be developed. Based upon the findings of this study, policies and programs in three major aspects are important. Firstly, policies and programs to provide stable financial income or support to the aging people are important (Stuifbergen et al. 2008). As indicated in this study, the aging Chinese with better financial support through an organized pension system or financial support program are likely to report a better status in well-being. Secondly, to meet the tangible caring need, home care support programs and services have to be developed to supplement the inadequate familial care and to provide a stronger support for the frail older adults in daily living activities. As indicated in previous research findings, home care support can play a key role in preventing hospitalization (Leich 2000), delaying institutionalization (Teri 1999), and providing a better prospect for the older adults to maintain independence in the community (Magilvy et al. 1994). All these support and services are believed to facilitate the older adults to receive the support and care they need so as to better fulfill the idea of “aging in place” (Phelan et al. 2004).

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## Part III

# Fathers, Mothers, Daughters, Sons

# Intimacy and Its Denial: When Sons and Daughters Talk About Fatherhood, Marriage and Work

18

Chan Kwok-bun

Allow me to begin by introducing myself and my relations with this association. I first met Professor Xiao Jing Jian a few years ago when he visited the Department of Sociology at Hong Kong Baptist University. That was the first time that I noticed ACFEA and the Journal of Family and Economic Issues that he is editing. Some of you may know that I subsequently edited a special issue for the journal on the subject of Chinese families in Hong Kong—I would love to hear your feedback to my work. Two-way communication and the exchange of ideas are very important for scholarship and creativity. Two months ago, with Professor Xiao's recommendation, I was awarded by Springer a contract to edit an international handbook on the Chinese family. This handbook consists of 40 chapters. A few days ago, I decided to call the book *International Handbook of Chinese Families*.

Of the 40 chapters in the handbook, I want to focus on two pieces today. I want to offer two vignettes, two pictures, two snapshots, to show the internal workings, or the psycho-social interiors, of the Chinese family. I want to look at how

the private, the personal, the internal, the local and the familial are being affected by the public and the global, by the external forces in the midst of globalization—and, of course, vice versa. I refer to the interplay between the private on the one hand and the public on the other, which lies at the core of what sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) calls “the sociological imagination.”

One of these vignettes concerns children: sons and daughters, talking about their own fathers and about fatherhood in Singapore. Some of you may not know that I spent 14 years in Singapore before returning to Hong Kong to teach in 2001. I thus consider Singapore to be one of my homes. The other vignette concerns daughters and single women in Hong Kong talking about men, intimacy, sexuality, marriage, family and, more importantly today, work. So, I am handling two post-colonial societies that are similar *and* different in a number of ways.

I would like to focus for a while on what I call the “historical sociology of colonialism” in Singapore and Hong Kong, while looking at the sociology of women, children, family and marriage over three generations. I want to look at marital and familial matters from the points of view of the less powerful members of the family; more specifically, I want to find out how these not-so-powerful family members talk about the more powerful members. Thus, we have children talking about their fathers, and women and daughters talking about their men, including “would-be” husbands and boyfriends. By adopting the vantage point of the victims, the underdogs,

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I want to turn families and the family story upside down; so, I am venturing down a radical path. I also want to keep my analytical focus very firmly on gender politics, the power game that lies at the heart of the family drama, whether the family is Chinese or not.

For my first vignette, I borrow some of my analysis from the author of Chap. 20 in this book, Hing Ai Yun, who was my sociology colleague at the National University of Singapore. Her chapter is titled, "Children and their Fathers in Singapore: A Generational Perspective." In Singapore, a post-colonial society, the traditional role of the father as the keeper of family order has over the generations been, and remains to this day, very resistant to change. New forms of the father-child relationship have also been slow to materialize. The immigrant fathers discussed in Hing's chapter were described by their children as uncaring, unloving, ungiving, vulgar, crude and irresponsible. These children described their fathers as having no concept of what a father is, meaning that their children suffered and lived with the consequences. Now that the children themselves have become fathers, they want to construct a new image of the father. Living under the economic conditions of colonial Singapore, the immigrant fathers found it difficult to provide for their families without help from their wives, whose contribution to the home was not properly appreciated by the formal economy or at home. As a consequence, in Singapore, you have the persistence of the myth of the male breadwinner, the protector, the family head, the decision maker, even though as late as the 1990s, mothers or wives contributed close to 40% of household incomes. Although these mothers' and wives' contributions have never been given public or private recognition, it is fair to say that their husbands actually took the roles assigned to them by society quite seriously; they were assigned these roles, and they performed them without question. One son interviewed by Hing recalled his father saying, "It's only fair. I have done my provider role, she (my wife) must play her homemaker role accordingly." These fathers worked very, very hard, sometimes at more than one job at a time: they were caught up in what I call the "money chase." Work in

colonial Singapore was stressful, even dangerous, but the fathers took pride in it, and they were very happy to be able to say to themselves that their "children can sleep soundly at night." Their hard work earned the money that allowed them to support a "respectable family life."

Work in the face of today's intense global competition continues to be onerous and stressful. What about second-generation fathers in Singapore then? These fathers continued to maintain what I call "indirect relations" or "no relations" with their children. On the one hand, they clung to an "authoritarian model" of fatherhood. On the other hand, they also wanted to enjoy the emergent desire within them for closeness and intimacy with their children. We are talking about a transitional model of fatherhood, one that falls between the old and new ways of being a father. This new desire for intimacy with one's children evoked a new emotion that these fathers found difficult to handle. They were actually afraid of this new feeling, this new emotion. So what was the result? Fathers and children communicated with each other indirectly, through women, the third party, the conductor. Fathers were dependent on women to communicate with their own children. These women, mothers, sisters, daughters and grandmothers, thus played a very pivotal, mediating role. Children saw their fathers making selfless sacrifices for them and their families. They praised their fathers; they considered them to be good providers. The children respected their fathers, treated them with deference and even approached them with fear. But, at the same time, they felt unloved and neglected. They complained about the absence of the father. Sometimes, fathers beat their children in an attempt to maintain discipline and family order. They disciplined them by canning them or leaving them in a corner to repent quietly. The underlying goal was to instill unquestioning obedience and conformity in the children. The children of these second-generation fathers told Hing that they had sworn to themselves that they would never become like their fathers. They would never, ever become the dictators their fathers had been if they were to marry and have children.

In a post-colonial Singapore society governed by authoritarianism, these fathers didn't feel



confident that they were doing the right thing by practicing a more liberal parenting style. The result was that they ended up flip-flopping, vacillating between the old model of toughness and the new model of tenderness, which caused a lot of confusion both for their children *and* for themselves. There were a lot of confused children *and* confused fathers.

I now turn to a third model and the third generation. This generation has witnessed the emergence of greater confidence on the part of fathers in striking a balance, in articulating and arbitrating between strictness and discipline on the one hand and reasoning, caring and loving on the other. They have endeavored to try out such concepts as empathy, nurturing, dialogue and communication with their children, and begun to show a deep desire for closeness with their wives. But even now, in the third generation, we cannot find true communication between fathers and children. Idealized mutual disclosure, the so-called reciprocal disclosure between members of a dyad, is still not widely practiced in Singapore. The primary mode of relating to another in a close domestic relationship is silent intimacy, not vocal intimacy: I want to be intimate with you, but I won't tell you this; I don't know how to tell you. This type of silent intimacy is opposed to what Western liberal practice calls "disclosing intimacy," that is, revealing the self and working at knowing and emphasizing the other. Fathers, even in the third generation, feel inadequate about "doing intimacy," and so they concentrate on what they are very good at, which is work. They are not good at expressing emotion, and so they turn to something that they have been very good at since childhood—working. They hope that by working hard, by earning a good income, everything will fall into place. But, unfortunately, not everything falls into place. I will tell you why later.

As a result of the intensification of work under globalization and the vulnerabilities that result from erratic business cycles in the wake of such events as the Asian financial crisis and the collapse of Lehman Brothers and other investment banks, a new divide has very quickly replaced the old divide of unloving fathers on the one hand and unloved children on the other. Fathers' continued attempts

to play the role of provider fit in very well with silent intimacy, and, together, they produce what sociologists call the "commodification of love." Love is commodified and has become a product; something we call the "ATM father" has been created: children approach or contact their father only to ask him to visit the ATM machine and take money out of his bank account. Meanwhile, the father remains little understood.

The common experience of the Chinese child in the twenty-first century, I argue, is one of loneliness and solitude. Let me quote from one of these children, a child from a poor family, who said this about his father: "I feel a wall is building between us, but it is impossible that he does not work. We are not rich. I feel bad that despite his age, he still has to work so hard." And this from the child of a well-to-do business family: "He always gives me money; my father always gives me money ... sometimes I wonder if I am his son or a commodity that can be satisfied with material goods. He is using money in exchange for love, which is why I am spending so much now, hoping he will scold me, so that father and son at least have an opportunity to argue. Even television tells us money cannot buy love." I argue that this type of neglect of the child is a universal social problem, but is probably more intensely so in the Chinese family.

The New Age Father remains a nominal fiction. Only a few upper-middle class fathers who have surplus money, may—although they also may not—succeed in attaining intimacy with their children. If they do, then these New Age Fathers are very special people indeed; they are nominated by their children as models for emulation. This new kind of father is what his children would desire to become. What about the working class children? The picture here is very grim indeed. Their fathers cannot provide even the minimum for their children. They feel shame and humiliation and, because of this, they gradually lose control over their children whose respect they lost long ago. The status of these men may be even lower than that of their wives if they fail to put food on the table. More acutely, their children are keenly aware that their father is poor. Both the children and the father himself know it. This scenario is pervasive

in any rapidly changing and upwardly mobile society in which each generation seems to be more educated and affluent than its parents. As a result, fathers feel ashamed of themselves because they cannot keep up with their children. Sociologist Richard Sennett (and John Cobb) (1993) probably had this phenomenon in mind when he wrote about the “hidden injuries of class.”

What about fathers’ relationship with their daughters? I think this relationship has traversed the farthest in Singapore and in many other Asian and Chinese societies because, unfortunately, patriarchy has not been dismantled, only remade. Patriarchy has been reinvented. Daughters in Singapore are discovering a new role of production, but they are also reminded by their fathers and Asian society that this new role must remain secondary to their original role of reproduction. Fathers tell their daughters, “You must never forget that.” As a result, society places these women in the secondary labor market and bestows upon them a secondary status. When daughters go out to work, to labor, they begin to lose touch with their mothers, and their fathers.

I now want to move away from this picture of sons and daughters talking about their fathers to a second picture: why do Hong Kong women marry or not marry, and how do they talk about men in Hong Kong? I want to deal with sexuality, intimacy, romance, marriage, relationships and, most importantly, work. To work or not to work. To marry or not to marry. Here, I re-state some of the arguments by the sociologist May Partridge, who wrote Chap. 29 of this handbook, titled “Setting out Conditions, Striking Bargains: Marriage-Stories and Career Development Among University Educated Women in Hong Kong.” In this period of late modernity or post-modernity, there is insistent demand for all of us, both men and women, to be reflexive, to be liberated as social actors because changes are so quick and so profound that explanations of any given change today may no longer be relevant tomorrow. My explanation for today remains valid only until midnight. Tomorrow is another day and presents another picture. This constant change, the accelerated pace of change in today’s globalized world, demands that human beings be totally and comprehensively reflexive so as to make sense of their own

lives. And so we are presented with a very deep existential question: How is one to know how to get on with life when every undertaking, large or small, continually requires adjustment? How do I go on living when what makes sense today may not seem to tomorrow?

In this respect, I would like to work towards a historical sociology of Chinese women in Hong Kong or other Chinese societies, on whose part there is a growing unwillingness to surrender their emotional needs for communication and intimacy simply in order to be married. This represents the first part of my focus. The second is the increasing unwillingness to sacrifice the self and the body to either work or family. These two themes have very profound implications for marriage and work. Let me remind all of you that modern marriages locate themselves in a social world where work is done over which self or family has very little control. In fact, family and self must adjust to work; they must “play second fiddle” to work, to industry, to capitalism, to production.

Let me now turn quickly to the stories of three Hong Kong women narrated by Partridge. Woman A, when Partridge interviewed her, said things like “something is wrong with our world, our globe, the ‘bigger picture’” because she and her partner struggled against exhaustion to find time, any time, to achieve intimacy. Her solution was to avoid marriage. She said she was tired of looking for a man who could make himself available emotionally and offer her love. Woman B had discarded the classic discourse on marriage and viewed it instead simply as a friendly, temporary association that should last only as long as it worked for *both* parties—not as a lasting bond. Woman C, in her early forties at the time of the interview, had given up on any form of marriage or other mutually supportive relationship. She also presented a very profound paradox: she told Partridge that she was now looking to her relationships at work for emotional sustenance. She had discovered that she could have a deep relationship with her boss, whether male or female, and that this relationship would motivate her to work even harder—for capitalism.

Work is becoming for many adults the primary, if not the only, source of satisfaction in their lives, which reminds me of Arlie Hochschild’s (1989)

work on the “second shift.” Work has thus become a refuge, a haven, as intimate relationships are seen as messy and miserable. This singular, one-dimensional emotional dependence on work, on production, is dangerous and makes people vulnerable, as conditions at work can suddenly change for the worse, due to, for example, market collapse, job loss, retirement, retraining or underemployment. There is also a temptation for women to blame men for the latter’s lack of love or emotional availability. Indeed, women in Hong Kong do hold men responsible in this way. They complain that men do not feel responsible for their partners’ emotional well-being. There is a new divide between men and women in Hong Kong.

Allow me to perform a Marxian analysis here. In our post-modern world, middle-class males, and now females also, have recently moved back to working in sweatshops, although these sweatshops are electronic sweatshops. This is a world, a social world, created around a story, a myth, of how “real” men should work, and must work: as rational actors unswayed by feelings. We can talk about the irrationality of rationality or, the other way around, the rationality of irrationality. And so we have a methodology built around a story made up by owners and managers, bureaucrats and politicians, who are the beneficiaries of this story, who have the power to create economic competition and who are now in the position to benefit from exploitation, from the capitalist system.

We are inching towards a new age of anxiety, or an age of new anxiety, that is perhaps more omnipresent, more profound than when Sigmund Freud first wrote about it in his psychoanalysis of dreams. There are very deep emotional consequences for the men and women, sons and daughters, and fathers and mothers working in today’s environment of constant unfailing global competition, now widely called globalization, which is filled with constant threat and anxiety. Hochschild (1983) told us a while ago in her book, *The Managed Heart*, that only a man, and a woman, who can manage their emotions in some way—by denial, projection, delayed gratification, displacement, replacement—can survive. The modern construction of masculinity guarantees that men today find it increasingly difficult to cater to

women’s newly discovered need for intimacy while, at the same time, being unable to acknowledge such a need in themselves. This is a denial of others that is simultaneously a denial of self. Indeed, it is a double denial.

As I mentioned earlier, work is intensifying: in Hong Kong, in Singapore, in Malaysia, in China, in Taiwan, and throughout the United States. I recently read a newspaper article noting that Europeans, particularly the French, are still putting up some resistance, by escaping to their weekend cottages at mid-day on a Friday, for example, but the Chinese continue to embrace work unashamedly. So there is now a trend of work intensification that has become global and omnipresent, although individuals, and sometimes even cultures, are resisting it. I am constantly reminded of the horrors of nineteenth century sweatshops in England. The electronic sweatshops of the knowledge and information society are actually a throwback to the nineteenth century, and would not seem unfamiliar to Charles Dickens. The effect of this tyranny of work, of the intensification of work in the public sphere, is now being expressed and acted out in the choices made about and the actions taken in marriage, sexuality, intimacy—meaning what work means is being expressed and acted out in relationships between husband and wife and parent and child. Lamentably, nothing has changed over the past three generations; in fact, things have actually got worse.

Let me conclude with the observation that the university-educated Chinese women of Hong Kong, Singapore and elsewhere are like what Partridge calls the “legendary frogs in the pot.” You put frogs, women, into a pot, underneath which is fire, the fire of globalization. So what do the frogs, the women, do when they feel the heat of this fire? (The point of the frog in this pot analogy is that the frogs may sit still and die because the change in temperature occurs too slowly for them to perceive it.) Women, and men too, handle the intensification of work by devising personal strategies. In other words, they find their own ways of dealing with it. They cope with globalization individually, personally. But as individuals, rather than as an organized unit, they do not become what Marx called the “class for itself.”

They become dispensable, vulnerable in times of economic change. Men and women as individuals are now extremely vulnerable to the ups and downs of the global economy, and therefore must suffer the impact of these economic ups and downs on their emotional lives, leaving deep scars and wounds behind. If we do nothing, then we might be left with what Habermas called the “colonization of the life world.” Not only will we have had the colonization of Singapore and Hong Kong, but we will all—men and women alike—also witness the colonization of our emotional lives. Habermas has given us a warning. Don’t say he didn’t!

In all post-modern information and knowledge societies, work and its norms extend themselves so ceaselessly that neither sex, male or female, can find enough time for sex, for emotional gratification, for children. They don’t have the time; they can’t afford the indulgence of the self. They must devote their total selves to coping with the “injuries of class.” But as any sociologist will

tell you, the root of the problem lies not with individual men or women, sons or daughters—nor with their psyches or their morality. The root problem is, as Karl Marx reminded us, the material conditions of work in the global economy, *as well as* the many discourses that attempt to justify these conditions and turn them into norms. To change it all, both the material conditions of work and the justifications of work practices and norms must be challenged.

The time to do it is now.

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# Father, Son, Wife, Husband: Philanthropy as Exchange and Balance

19

Chan Kwok-bun

It is the intent of this chapter to explain the motivation of altruism and philanthropy within the frameworks of two theoretical approaches: exchange theory and balance theory. The desire is to bear social theory on the analysis of economic behavior within the context of marital and familial relations, while also resorting to insights of family sociology and sociology of emotions, and of rationality. The methodology chosen here is the case study method: construction of a life-history narrative offered by a philanthropist in a long in-depth face-to-face interview, on-site visits of his schools, and prior conversations with as well as naturalistic observations of him on many diverse social occasions. This combination of methods used over a course of several years to gain intimacy with a person's life is a productive way to make sense of such complex human behavior as altruism and philanthropy. As such, details of the philanthropist's life are displayed in the narrative of this chapter in an attempt to examine a complex behavior within the context of a complex life.

I want to begin my chapter with several flashbacks to my 1994 book, *Stepping Out: The*

*Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs* (Chan and Chiang 1994). To most of the entrepreneurs in my book, philanthropy was an intentional strategy of upward social mobility through a transformation—from the economic elite to the cognitive elite and the moral elite. They would like to become the conscience of the community; having made their fortunes, they would then desire to enter the elite class. Once there, being part of the elite, they can then get access to some privileged information about the workings of the market. We all know that information is power and knowledge produces profit. Moral reputation is good for business. So in that sense, altruism is paid off in financial terms. This is the first point I would like to make. Many Chinese entrepreneurs, if they have to choose only one project to work on, would like to donate their time, money and effort to education. Why education? They would say in order to make their business move, to join the world, it is very important to be able to upgrade the overall quality of the citizens in any particular society, and education is the beginning of all, particularly, primary education. Education is a moral enterprise. Most Chinese entrepreneurs were poorly educated and they were once blocked from the elite which they desired to enter, through the back door, so to speak, by donating to education which sometimes rewards donors with honorific titles. This is my second point.

The third point I want to make is a bit psychoanalytical in temperament. Chinese people who haven't made a lot of money often tell themselves, rightly and wrongly, that those who have made a

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lot of money exploit those who haven't made a lot of money. This is very Marxian. So, how do they rationalize their conduct of exploitation of others? I think businessmen know that they need not talk about it, as it is a sort of unspeakable truth. So what do they do? They probably want to gain a certain psychological tranquility, certain self-comfort, certain self-consolation, and one way is to "give back to society" what they have made from society. On the other hand, by doing this, now that they have made it, financially, it would be very important for them to spend the rest of their lives on construction of self image, on "looking good"—to be a good man, a man with a good heart. By doing this, they will be asking for some kind of moral pardoning. Maybe they are also seeking moral glorification.

The fourth point I want to make is in terms of a question: now at the age of 70 or 80, how would they like to be remembered by others? I say: as a man of virtues. There is a very deep symbolic meaning here. Maybe there is a quest for symbolic immortality. Some people gain immortality by contributing money, other people, by building monuments and spectacular skyscrapers, by giving birth to a lot of male children, depending on your ethnicity and your class location in the society. Schools and universities do not disappear. They are not as perishable; they are "good goods" because they last. They are durable.

A very brief personal moment: when I was on the flight from Hong Kong to Singapore in 2009 for a speaking engagement, it suddenly dawned on me, reflectively, that my father's name is Chan Yan, or Ren in Putonghua. "Ren" in Chinese is benevolence, which is a central concept of Confucianism. What is "Ren"? "Ren" is basically about handling relationships between me and not me, me and others. That is the central idea. If we all can handle that well, we would have gone a long way toward construction of a harmonious society. I would like to look at philanthropy as a case of altruism, or what social psychologists call "pro-social behavior" or "helping behavior." Of course, the opposite to altruism is egoism, selfishness, self-centeredness. Altruism as moral commitments on the one hand and egoism as pleasure on the other may not be an either/or.

As Etzioni (1988, p. 67) maintains, they are a judicious mix, a balance. I think in all societies, at all times, there have been social discourses on the dialectic of altruism and egoism. These discourses cut across all disciplines and strata, bringing together scholars and laymen, individuals and society, men and nature—hopefully also moving people into a higher realm of human existence which, I reckon, is spirituality. And of course being spiritual is not the same as being religious. There is a very clear distinction between the two.

Recently, I have been writing about hybridity and cosmopolitanism (Chan 2010, 2011a, b) which, I argue, would be one important pathway to world peace. Susan Sontag (2003) wrote a brilliant book with a brilliant title, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Her conclusion is that, unfortunately and lamentably, we do not, in general, automatically feel the pain of others. Someone is bleeding right in front of you, but you do not necessarily feel the pain because we are completely divided and separated by our bodies. I cannot enter your physical body to feel your pain. She concludes that we do not naturally feel others' suffering. It is not an in-born aptitude, although sociologists try to remind us there is such a thing called "sympathy" or "empathy." And sociologists invented a graphic term for it, "role taking," taking the role of others. The layman term is "can I step into your shoes and see your plight from your point of view?" This is powerful. So I would feel you within you. That is role taking. But it is not an inborn ability, it has to be learnt. It has to be cultivated, internalized, and practiced. It is one thing that I want to do good, it is quite another thing to actually start doing it. Scholars talk a lot about things without actually doing them. And then you have some people doing it without talking too much about it. Commitments and action make up another binary (Etzioni 1988, p. 74).

Any inquiry into altruism, philanthropy or doing good would usually revolve around a few very simple, basic questions. Why would I help? Why should I help? Helping whom? On what project? For how long? What are my commitments? Now that I have already started the project, how long would I stay in it? Can I get out? When? How? Some people have been working on

a charity project for a number of years and they have become what I call “a slave to altruism,” “a slave of virtues” who have tilted the balance too far. There will be a time when they want to be a free man, free from being virtuous because it is now a burden, a trap. Or they would rework the balance, and swing back to egoism and pleasure.

Before writing this chapter, I did a life history case study of a Hong Kong philanthropist, an educationist: Francis C.K Lee. I had spent seven hours non-stop with Francis. We started from mid-afternoon and talked all the way through dinner in a Singaporean restaurant. It was a very long interview. Mr. Lee is not your Li Ka Shing though they have the same surname in Chinese. He has donated money to the building of two primary schools. One was named after his father, the other, his deceased wife, both being an integral part of his “sphere of the intimate” whereby the family is one of the most strategic and crucial contexts (Etzioni 1988, p. 82). He is an owner of a typical small and medium enterprise (SME), not a tycoon who has long been treated as a “hero” in academic studies. Mr. Lee certainly is not one of them, he is an “unsung hero” in overseas Chinese studies. One of the reasons I picked him for my case study is that I wanted to move away from big-time donors whom I had already written about in my book *Stepping Out*. I want to study those who are sort of in the middle realm. They are not high up there, they are in the middle, in-between. Sociologists are fascinated with those who are in-between. They are not upper, they are not lower.

I am trained as a social psychologist in the Chicago school of sociology tradition. So I have been reading people like William James, George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, Robert Park, etc. I am also a family sociologist. I am fond of using classical sociological theories to make sense of what is happening within the family, including my own family. And I always look at marriage as an ideal type of a human pair, a dyad, a two-some embedded in a larger whole, be it clan, kin network, community, society, the world.

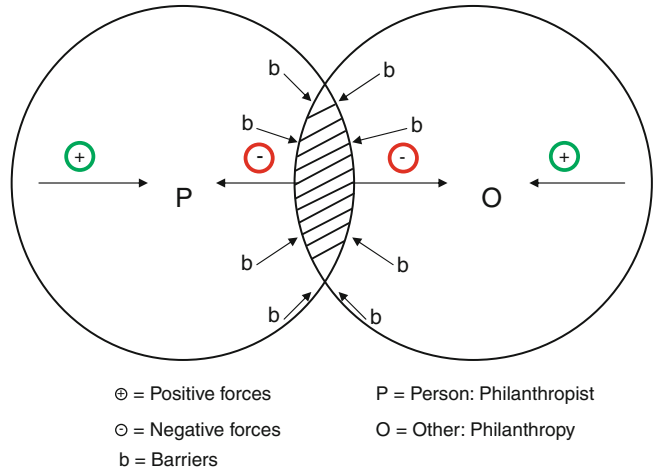
I would like to frame my chapter largely in terms of the exchange theory (Levinger 1982). In fact, the second part of the title of my chapter is

“Philanthropy as Exchange and Balance.” Five simple words. There are several basic postulates of this theory. One is that human actors seek to *maximize* reward and *minimize* cost. But humans don’t just maximize and minimize; they try to strike a balance, which, as a postulate, is a critique of the exchange theory. Another postulate is that a rewarding relationship will continue and, conversely, a costly relationship will discontinue. In the mind of an actor, there is something I call “mental calculus,” a certain kind of what economists call cost-and-benefit analysis, which is supposedly *rational* [if by acting rationally one means using information that is available, drawing proper conclusions from it, and so on (Etzioni 1988, p. 73)], intentional, deliberate, a kind of rational intelligence. It is pure economics which we sometimes call “rational choice.”

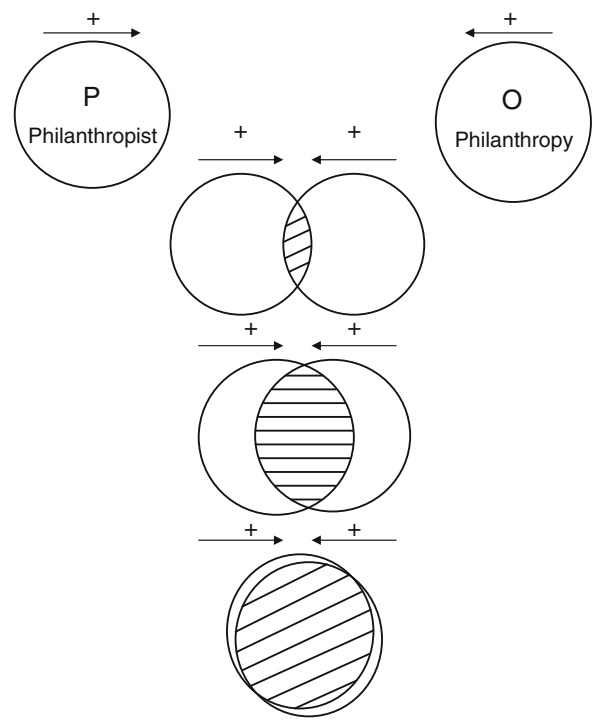
“To be or not to be, that is the question.” To give or not to give, that is the question, we ask ourselves. Anytime we have this question to answer, we enter into a certain kind of deliberations. One simple example of altruism is donating blood. I do not know how many of you sitting here had the experience of donating blood. You have to ask a lot of questions. What are the costs of donating? Costs of time, energy, and blood. And there is a cost of not donating, be it guilt or shame, two rather strong emotions among the Chinese. And there are benefits of donating: you feel good about yourself, your bolster your self-worth, you raise your self-esteem, you contribute to your self-growth, self-actualization. And there are benefits of not donating: saving time, saving the pain of the needle.

Let me now do some theoretical work. Let’s look at something we call the “pair.” It is a dyad, a two-some (Fig. 19.1). I call that the schema of person–other relationship. You draw two circles, call one circle, P, and the other, O. There is a middle area, an overlapping of the two circles. The P is the donor, the person who does good, the altruist, the philanthropist. The O is the other, the project of philanthropy, something that we do, it is an act, for example, to build a school, to donate a kindergarten, a museum. Then, there are forces that push the P and the O toward each other, which I call the positive forces.

**Fig. 19.1** A P–O schema



**Fig. 19.2** Forces of attraction in P–O relations



Of course one ideal scenario is when circle P overlaps circle O, totally, completely—in fact one circle is on top of another circle (Fig. 19.2). (But “ideal” according to whom? From whose point of view? May this state not be the best, the ideal?). At this moment, I and my philanthropy cannot be distinguished. Two rolled into one. I become a *24-h philanthropist*, not part-time.

This is amazing, like falling in love. Imagine this man P, this woman O, and they are together, two bodies, two minds, two souls, combined to become one. The two are now madly in love; I cannot separate myself from her, and vice versa. We see each other every minute, every second. That is *romantic love*, which, in its extreme form, may represent something that is sick, mad, and

abnormal. There are forces pushing them to stay together, to be stuck with each other—or the philanthropist is “stuck with” his philanthropy. Of course, there are also forces pushing P and O away from each other, meaning that there are some reasons or forces because of which the donor cannot be too fully engaged in his charity work, which may turn out to be a good thing, a balance, as too much of a good thing is *bad*. We call these negative (*and* positive) forces.

Let me move on. Let's look again at the pair, the P the person, the donor, and the O the other, the act, the charity project. We can talk about an attraction to the relationship. What attracts me to this P–O relationship, what attracts me to this project, what attracts me to philanthropy? I would argue, recalling the exchange theory, that attraction is directly associated with its perceived rewards, and inversely with its perceived costs, emphasizing the significance of perception of things, of subjectivity of the person as perceiver, as cognitive man. Rewards are positive outcomes, referring to the receipt of resources, such as love, care, status, information, goods, security, support, and so forth. Costs refer to the expenditure of time, energy and, of course, huge amounts of money in the case of philanthropy and charity. You would terminate this relationship of the pair if there is a drastic shift in perceived costs and rewards. In other words, you will stop donating when the costs are higher than the rewards, among other factors or circumstances.

What is in it for me? What are my rewards? What are the attractions to me in order for me to go into a pair of relationship, in order to “do philanthropy”? As I said earlier, one of the rewards is information, if I could get access to an item of “perfect information” by virtue of the act of philanthropy, by being able to make an entry into the elite—and I also know that knowledge is power, especially in the market of capitalism. Another reward would be status, symbolic standing, personal reputation, social location in the community, particularly in a highly stratified society in both materialist and symbolic terms. And then you have other rewarding things like social honor, cultural honor, meaning of life. Here I am intimating existentialism, self-actualization, hierarchy

of needs, and so forth. *The sociology of emotions* tells us one of the most profound rewards in doing good is joy, the pleasure, the enjoyment, the satisfaction, the happiness in doing good. It is *better to give than to take*.

What did Francis Lee tell me in the interview? He recalled his first encounter with philanthropy as a schoolboy passing by the front door of a famous charitable organization in Hong Kong, Po Leung Kuk, which was first set up to protect women:

Maybe it's destiny. When I was about 10–11 years old, I passed by Po Leung Kuk and wondered what it is. I knew it was a charitable organization. I looked at the inscription underneath the Kuk's name. I felt sort of interested in it even I had no idea about its service. So I went back and searched for some information about the Kuk. Later I learned about the historical background of the Kuk; it was a specialized organization protecting women, which has developed over the years into a comprehensive, integrated charitable organization. I had strong interest in the Kuk, without knowing the exact reason. At that time, I told myself one day I would be going to the Kuk to give a helping hand to the needy. This was a memorable recollection for me; at that time I was only a little kid, 10–11 years old, still hadn't graduated yet from the primary school.

Francis told me that his businessman-father valued primary education very highly. But Francis was a high school drop-out. His father always complained, “Oh my goodness! What happens to my son?” The young Lee was a shameful and guilty son. Francis didn't do well in school but he inherited his father's business, transformed it and made an enormous amount of money:

My academic results were not good when I was in high school. This made me feel disappointed about the teachers and the curriculum. I could not tolerate the stupid textbooks, they were too easy for me. I didn't think the teachers cheated to make a living, but I did think that their educational levels were too low. This was how I grew up. So you can now imagine why I read all sorts of books except textbooks.

I was so disappointed about education. During school days, I disliked going to school, which planted some sort of thoughts in me that I had never fully expressed.

While growing up as a schoolboy, I showed full competence in all aspects except in my studies. For example, I was good at sports. However, my father is a very traditional man, he is very smart. When he

was very ill, he told me I would not be able to continue my studies. Even he didn't say it, I truly understood how *disappointed* he was with me. On the one hand, I failed in my studies. On the other hand, he could never understand why his son was *so stupid*. No matter what, in my father's eyes, I was not ambitious, making him exceedingly *disappointed*. I am his only son, but we had no communication at all. How would fathers and sons communicate at that time?

As a failed son, Francis felt compelled to make good, to make it right.

"Gee, I remember what my father always told me and I agree with him that education is important, so I put out money to build two schools, one named after my father and the other, my wife—to remember *two loved* ones, both deceased now." Francis's philanthropy was an affirmation of his father's belief, which he hoped to transmit to the next generation. Francis's wife died of a stroke and heart attack. He was feeling intensely guilty about not having been able to treat her sickness fast enough. He felt a lifelong guilt. His wife loved kids and she liked to spend a lot of time with them. So he built the second school to name after her. He told me that every time he comes to the school, when he sees the children, he experiences the kind of deep inner joy that his wife often spoke of. He said, "When I come to this school, I know this is my wife's school. In this school, this office (where we did the interview), it is almost like a kind of *communion between me and my wife*, who is long gone, in heaven—a communication between people in this world and people in the other world. This gives me enormous satisfaction." Francis has long obtained his rewards:

I truly respected my father. He started his business from scratch. He was upright for his whole life, with an enthusiasm towards education. He helped numerous people in need. I fully understand that there was a *regret deep* down his heart, as he could not go to school due to the political circumstances at the time.

The passing away of my beloved wife, Fanny Tsang, broke my heart. I found myself feeling terribly guilty. There were lots of problems in the hospital. My wife was only 47 when she met her death. In the past, she always accompanied me to the school I built for my father during weekends, sometimes with her dog. She was so kind, her colleagues loved her. Once, I saw a little girl queuing up waiting for her snack; she looked so adorable.

At that moment, I made a wish to myself to build another school to remember my wife. That year, after Fanny passed away, I could not work at all. From that year onwards, I was officially retired, I closed down my business, sold it, and resigned from work.

My wife was enthusiastic about education. She had no sons or daughters, which made her treat her students like her own children. There are newcomers at the school every year, which is why I use this way to remember her.

Both father and son did not finish high school. Francis's investments in schools were motivated and moved by the bondage of love with his father and with his wife. Love is almighty. Love is a many-splendored thing.

Francis said that he has learnt a lot from philanthropy; altruism has given him a lot, ten times more than he has given away. He is feeling indebted to altruism. He also said that Hong Kong has been very good to him; it is in Hong Kong where he made a lot of money, so he wanted to give back. "This is the place where my children were born. I am happy here so I want to give back." He also mentioned that the business world is a "dog-eat-dog world," it is merciless, heartless, it is capitalism, it is commercialism. The opposite to capitalism, to him, is philanthropy, altruism, charity, giving children an education. Seen in this way, capitalism and altruism almost become two opposite ideal types, though a good sociologist would try to deconstruct the tension between the two, to balance them:

I did a wide variety of things in my life. But among all, I find running schools the most fulfilling. When I meet and play with children, I feel exceedingly happy and excited. I had worked in The Hong Kong Society for the Aged, the biggest organization serving the elderly. But I had never had any fulfillment working there. It was an unending battle. Actually, I have already resigned from many such duties these years.

Regarding the rewards ... in fact starting from the '70s, I have been doing voluntary work, such as at the Lions Club, Po Leung Kuk, the Hong Kong Society for the Aged. There, I can get in touch with things I do not usually encounter. My horizon is broadened, which money cannot buy. Secondly, it is very pleasant to see children playing at the school, again this is something you can't buy. Thirdly, after several years of cooperation and collaboration with my teaching and administrative staff, I believe that my team is the most outstanding one in Hong Kong.



I feel much pride to have formed such a powerful team. What's more, this team can influence the next generation. *Money cannot buy* these kinds of fulfillment and pride, and the money spent was only a minimal amount. After all, we are born and bred here in Hong Kong.....

Pride, pleasantness, joy are strong emotions, which "money cannot buy."

Now let's move away from the rewards, the attractions, to what I call barriers. Looking at Fig. 19.1 again, these are the arrows all pointing in one direction. When sociologists try to explain why a loveless marriage does not end in divorce, they theorize that one should identify and look at what they call barriers. Barriers are forces that keep the husband and wife in a miserable relationship. The fact that the husband and wife do not love each other doesn't mean they will end the relationship with a divorce. There are probably a lot more loveless marriages out there than we would admit. How to make sense of that? One explanation, socio-psychologically, lies in the *strength of the barriers*. There are a lot of sociological forces that keep the marriages intact, without the marriages transiting into divorces.

Theoretically, I am saying that even if there is very little delight in a marital relationship, the existence of strong barriers, restraining forces, would create a kind of empty-shell marriage, a prison, a trap, such that the couple inside cannot or would not get out. Some would call this "all form, no substance." Sometimes staying together, remaining married legally in the eyes of community, overrides all other values, including your own happiness, the happiness of your wife, of your children. Both of you know that you are not happy with each other, but that is not a good enough reason to get a divorce. Why? Because there are social barriers, as the sociology of relationships has told us. For example, many of us would say that we should not divorce because it would harm the kids. Or, we should not divorce for neighborhood respectability. Or, divorce is too much of a stigma. It is still a stigma in a lot of Chinese societies worldwide. Or because of religious reasons, people in the church may say. In other words, I ask a very sociological question here: what would others say about us getting a

divorce? So far, I am drawing an analogy to compare marriage as a pair with the situation of a donor stuck with a project which he cannot drop because of barriers, or forces that keep him in and keep him from getting out. Barriers derive themselves from the social structure. The sociology of relationships would call these barriers commitments, obligations, devotions. It is particularly so when the donor has made a public declaration, an announcement, of his charity work which takes on a force of its own and would become a new psychological force against termination of the pair relationship.

So Francis Lee said, "the two schools, because of the names that they *bear*, *cannot fail*. I can fail, but the schools cannot. They represent my two only loves in my life. They cannot fail, they must be the best in Hong Kong. They must continue, the show must go on, no matter what." In a very ironic, deep way, Francis, in my view, is locked into this pair of relations, sort of "imprisoned," "caught," "captivated," as a slave to virtues, altruism, philanthropy. The Chinese call this condition "riding a tiger but not being able to get off its back." One cannot stop, period. Let me now tighten the screw a bit even harder. Francis said solemnly, "Professor Chan, I have no successor." He has no successor. The guy is lamenting about it. And I naturally asked "What about your children?" He said, "my children do not have the ability, nor the heart, to be my successor. Let me say, if you do not have the ability, you can learn it, but if you do not have the heart, forget about it." So Francis has given up on the possibility of any of his children inheriting his project of doing things for their stepmother and grandfather. Neither could Francis find a friend who would carry on for him. So he cannot pass his philanthropy to anybody else, not in the family, not outside the family either. This is a *dilemma*, a *real plight*. In the past two months, I have not seen him as regularly as before. He was worried that he might die in the same way his wife did. He was complaining about heart murmurs, irregular heart-beat, his heart condition:

This is my biggest difficulty. How can I continue my belief, enhance and glorify it? I don't want any of my children to inherit my schools, as I truly know that they don't have such qualifications,

neither the benevolence nor the values. Especially in this year, my health condition burdens me a lot. In fact, I have no idea how to deal with the problem, the problem of succession. Where could I find someone who has sentiments toward the schools? As I always say, techniques can be learned, but if you don't have the sentiment toward the school, you will definitely not dedicate your time to the school. If someone does not teach well, I will give him/her tutorials or let him/her attend seminars. We have a team to assist such teachers. Though others are running, and s/he is just walking, s/he will gradually achieve the goal someday and eventually arrive. However, if you lack the heart, or you are not willing to commit yourself, or you dislike children and want to kick them out, how can you be a successful educator? This is impossible. So, if I can find someone who has the right kind of feeling about the school, and with a better vision and health than mine, I am willing to hand my two schools over to him or her. Just like that. But it is not easy to find such a person at this stage.

For Francis, the best of all possible worlds would be that he has children who have the heart and the ability to pick up where he left off. That way, egoism merges with altruism. Many tycoons "cave in" in the sense that they pass on their wealth to incompetent and wasteful children—knowingly. But Francis did not.

Francis continued:

As I mentioned before, other things are not important for me. I am only a passer-by in this world. However, as the two schools are named after my father and my wife, while my own failures are nothing to me, I cannot spoil my father's and my wife's reputation.

He was pursuing an immortality of his own also, being fearful that his children will spoil them all.

The exchange theory has another critical component, the "alternative," the option. Let me make an argument: even if the internal attractions within the pair are low, meaning the P and the O are not attracted to each other anymore, and even when the barriers against dissolution of the relationship are weak, the pair will not terminate and dissolve unless one side thinks that there is a more attractive alternative out there. Is there a "third party" or not? "Is there a triad?," I asked Francis Lee. I asked him, "Well, you have been running these schools for years, have you ever thought about any alternative project other than education, or have you ever thought about not

doing anything at all? Stop it. Now you have a heart condition. Do you want to be a free man? Do you want to be free from philanthropy, from it all? I have done it, now I stop, I do not want to do it till the moment I die. Can you get some kind of liberation from this bondage to goodness? In other words, do you want to get control of yourself?" He replied, simply, "*No, education is my life!*" Again a binary: egoism (his health) versus altruism. By then, seven hours had passed, and it was already midnight. We stopped the interview, but I cannot stop thinking back on his clear convictions about education:

What is "Sun Education"? To be simple, sun is an indispensable element for human beings. Sunlight brings us warmth and light, it shines at humans' prosperity, but the most interesting thing is, whether poor or rich, pretty or ugly, the sun shines on us all and treats us all the same, which coincides with the old Chinese saying "No Child left behind." I hope to act like the Sun, to ask for no rewards, but to give anyway. Hence, we use sunlight to symbolize our structure and techniques. We design our own curriculum to educate our next generation, let them experience more, learn from their experience. With good experience, their logical and critical thinking can be developed. Some of our curriculums are brilliant, which is underpinned by our basic philosophy of education—"The Sun Education."

Francis's two schools have been for many years a training ground for teachers in Hong Kong and from overseas, thus widely and wildly sowing the seeds of his "Sun Education" philosophy.

I am completely aware of the fact that my whole theoretical approach thus far has taken on an individualistic orientation, meaning I consider social exchange in terms of a reciprocity that occurs within a dyad, a pair. It is a "restricted exchange" between two objects, within a particular relationship. But being a sociologist I would be the first one to argue that in future theorizing and research about philanthropy, we have to move away from this individualistic orientation and toward a more collectivistic orientation. We have to look at the pair interaction as part and parcel of a social net within a wider structure. We have to move from the restricted exchange to a generalized exchange, which would enable us to focus on the influence of the community and social networks. We should work toward the sociology, even the political economy, of altruism.

One of my theoretical concerns is with the unit of analysis in studies of altruism. By moving away from individualism to collectivism, I am moving away from restricted exchange to generalized exchange. I want to build theoretical bridges between individualism, a pair, the donor on the one hand, and his or her project, social networks, community, society, nation, even beyond nation, a kind of transnationalism or cosmopolitanism on the other hand, which may bring us all the way up to the realm of the spiritual. As I said earlier, the realm of the spiritual is not the same as the realm of the religious. With that, I will return to the origins, the roots, of humanity.

How should future research on philanthropy proceed? The first point I want to make is about the importance of theory, especially in sociology and anthropology. Anthropology in fact has a long history of studying the act of giving and the meaning of gifts. The anthropology of gifts has a very long tradition. So I want to bring theory back. In terms of choice of research methods, I want to go back to the Chicago school of sociology. I want to do anthropology, I want to do fieldwork, and family case studies. Like studying Francis, I would put him, the P, in the network of the others. Here, one can think of several concentric circles. This is Chicago school, which is also very Chinese in terms of Confucianism. You put the individual, the social person, in the center, and then you draw a lot of circles, outreaching concentric circles. The innermost circle surrounding the self is where you find “the sphere of the intimate,” which includes family members. I really do not believe one can study philanthropy without understanding how the family works. We should not just do case studies of individuals; rather, we have to do family case studies, family biographies, family life histories.

Again, on theory and theory-building, my case study enables me to arrive at a conclusive moment now, which I cannot better describe than quoting Etzioni (1988, p. 83):

The concept of a single over-arching utility disregards a major human attribute observable in the behavior under study: people do not seek to maximize their pleasure, but to balance the service of two major purposes—to advance their well-being and to act morally. The quest for balance is evident

in that, as individuals advance one major over-arching concern, they continuously strive not to neglect the other.

The second point I want to make pertains to comparative studies. How should I put it? Back in graduate school, my professors told me many times that what characterizes sociology is its method of comparison. But I very quickly realized that my professors themselves had never done any comparative work! He told us about it but he didn’t do it. Why? Because comparison is very difficult to do. My professors also told me, “Do not do surveys, try to do fieldwork, anthropology, ethnography.” I later discovered that my professors had done almost no fieldwork either because fieldwork requires you to be there; for surveys, you can use research assistants who work in the comfort of a lab to collect second-hand data for you. I think it is very important to do ethnography, fieldwork and comparison. We have to keep comparing, for example, Chinese families with non-Chinese families, to discover the particular or the unique among the general, and vice versa—in order to say “all philanthropists are the same, and different.” They are all the same, everywhere, but they are different in their own ways. By doing comparison and contrast, we discover the unfamiliar amidst the familiar, and we can also begin to deconstruct certain approaches and certain ideas long ossified by essentialists and culturalists. Here, I would like to refer to a book titled *A Study of the Development of Charity Undertakings in China* edited by Xu Lin (2005). The editor tried to look at philanthropy in China, but he did it by making comparisons, all the way. So, you have China here, and Taiwan, Singapore, Canada, and the United States there. He did that intentionally, so that he would be able to draw conclusions on China on the basis of very good comparative data.

Let me end my chapter with a comparison of three places: Hong Kong, Singapore, and Canada. I was born in China, grew up in Hong Kong, educated in Canada, and then went to Singapore in 1987 to teach for 14 years. Then I returned to Hong Kong in 2001 as a return migrant. I am intensely concerned about these societies. I always look at these societies through comparative lenses. If you look at the private donations in these places, there

is a rough ratio: if Singapore is 1, Hong Kong is 7, and Canada is 84. Canada has a population of 30 million people, but they have 22 million donors, 71%. And the average amount of money donated by Canadians, as individuals, is 260 Canadian dollars per year. What do you want? Do you want to work on big time donors, like in Singapore and Hong Kong? Or do you prefer the Canadian way whereby philanthropy is *everybody's business* except those who are very poor? I guess the 30% of non-donors are the very poor people who cannot afford anything in their own lives but waiting for others to help. The 70% of donorship is a staggering figure. I think all societies should move toward that model rather than relying on the big-time tycoons. So I am not interested in the Li Ka Shings, I am interested in the Francis Lees. The more Francis Lees, the better. I am interested in those who are in the middle or even those in the below. I want to do sociology of everyday-life altruism, or sociology of commonplace philanthropy. We all realize that, yes, there is indeed a private self, a me, an egoism, such that I must look after myself, my family, my domestic world, my private world, but there is also a larger world out there, a community, a society, a universe. If I can only tell myself that there is a deep, deep relationship between the small world of the family and marriage and the larger world, the world of the sun, that the two worlds coexist inter-dependently..... but that takes a lot of education and re-education, an enormous amount of re-socialization and self-reflective meditation.

So altruism must be a way of life for each and every individual so that we are not at the mercy of the big-time tycoons and we are not dependent on the heroes. Giving must be part and parcel of being human. So let us go back to Sontag's book. If you see somebody is in pain, somebody suffering, you can feel it. You can feel it not because of an in-born ability, but because you have learnt it through education, socialization, sensitivity training, self-reflection, self-cultivation. Giving has now become a way of life. It is as natural as breathing air. Or as basking in the sunshine on the beach.

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## Children and Their Fathers in Singapore: A Generational Perspective

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Hing Ai Yun

Much was done in the 1990s to investigate cultural representation and discourses about fatherhood, father-child relationships and children's well-being (Marsiglio 1998). All this occurred against the backdrop of fundamental shifts in family life and gender relations. Most studies on fatherhood have based their investigations on the standard household survey, which does not accurately reflect the diverse experiences of fathers and their relationships with their children (Marsiglio et al. 2000; Dienhart 1998, p. 28). These shortcomings have generated the need for a more nuanced approach to examining father-child relations, which is instigated in this study.

Since the 1990s, scholars have recognised the need to move beyond simplistic analyses of the presence or absence of fathers in the family, noting the fluidity and variety in their multifaceted connections to other family members. To view the father-child terrain in all its dimensions, some researchers have begun broadening their investigations to look at fatherhood as a role embedded within a larger ecological context (Lupton and Barclay 1997).

This chapter reports on an exploratory study that purports to examine the father-child relationship in all its complexity. The more specific aim of the chapter, however, is to study the ideological

shifts and changes in the dominant cultural images of the father from a generational framework. The interrogation into fathers' relationships with their children over a number of generations is most famously reflected in the study by Pleck and Pleck (1997). Historians such as Pleck and Pleck (1997) and deMause (1974) have tended to rely on prescriptive literature to understand the day-to-day manifestations of fatherhood in the Victorian era. The aim here, however, is rather less ambitious, focusing more on actual fathering behaviour. The purpose is to step beyond simplified and nostalgic representations of fatherhood to a more complex view. Thus, this chapter looks at how fatherhood is actually practised in the context of shifting normative frameworks.

Social definitions of fatherhood are not simply reproduced through its everyday practises; such definitions may also be undermined. While social actors use culturally available rhetoric about fatherhood to account for their own practises, they invariably contribute to the invention of new cultural templates in situations where old rules and norms have failed them. The concern here is to explain and make sense of the ideals of fatherhood and its practical realities, in an unstable social world that is constantly being created and reproduced through everyday activity.

Most work on ideology tends to narrowly assume that ideological structures automatically function to sustain the hegemony of dominant groups. Mainstream Marxist interpretations of ideology carry this bias. A commonly quoted Althusserian text on ideology says, "all ideology

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has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects” (Althusser 1971, p. 160). As such, functional analyses are inadequate because they do not problematise how ideologies are produced and reproduced at the individual level of everyday practise. According to Warren (1990), it is vital to investigate individuals’ everyday life situations to reveal how ideologies are produced or reproduced, and to see whether particular ideologies may work to undermine individual cognitive capacity. An improved perspective on understanding the reproduction of hegemonic ideological structures comes from Rose (1996) and Burchell (1993), who suggest that more attention should be paid to techniques of the self in this regard.

Singapore provides a unique opportunity for the study of changing normative frameworks. In the past four decades, the society has experienced rapid economic development, rising levels of education and globalisation. These trends have combined to transform how families work and organise themselves. They have also opened up alternative ways by which individuals conceptualise and practise the age-old role of father. The transition in father-child relationships across generations provides a wealth of examples of the old interacting with the new.

The dynamic mechanisms of this process of transformation are best revealed in the life course interviews, which is the method used for this study. Interviews were conducted with grandfathers (around ages 75–86), as well as with their sons (around 50 years old) and grandsons (in their late 20s) who may now be fathers. It was hoped that this triangulation of data would serve to capture multiple perspectives on fatherhood. The sample of 95 respondents for this study was obtained through the snowballing method. Not all 95 interviews conducted (pairs of fathers and children) were included for this analysis, as some were not complete enough for comparisons to be made. Apart from portraying the dynamics involved in the transition of fatherhood from one generation to the next, the in-depth qualitative interviews were used to draw out personal biographies that could portray the complexities of father-child relationships. It is opportune to select Singapore for study because the country has

undergone rapid industrialisation and compacted radical socioeconomic transformations within a short span of four decades. Corresponding changes can be traced and reflected at the level of individuals who are alive to tell their own experiential histories.

The intention is to illustrate, through this layered examination of personal lives of fathers and adult children, how social structures and dominant conventions characteristic of each era have been transformed, and to identify the emergent spaces available for individuals’ exercise of agency. This design contrasts with the historically derived categorisations of father-child relations obtained by Aries (1962), deMause (1974) and Pleck and Pleck (1997). This study is aimed at capturing factors that are contingent and dynamic in the making of such relationships.

Nonetheless, when gathering the individual stories, we were mindful that contrasting needs of respondents passing through different stages in their life cycle may cause systematic biases to surface (Aquilino 1999). It is hoped that through the research method selected here, some of this distortion will be addressed, because the adults interviewed for the role of “child” are already mature; being fathers themselves, they can speak about issues pertaining to fatherhood from a more empathic standpoint. In fact, when recalling how they had been disciplined, fathers who were interviewed often admitted they now realised their fathers had taken certain disciplinary actions out of love. By concentrating on specific events that actually occurred, rather than dwelling on hypothetical future scenarios, it is hoped to illuminate how reality and ideology intersect in everyday life.

Families from different class positions have been included to develop a richer understanding of the diverse socioeconomic contexts and interpersonal processes involved in configuring father-child relationships.

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## Background Context to Singapore

The authoritarian state of modern Singapore represents the culmination of a violent and brutal process of capitalist penetration starting with British colonial rule and the 10-year counter-insurgency

war against Communism. Historically, Singapore served as a wealthy trading post that mediated the China trade, the spice trade, and the collection and distribution of resources produced in maritime and mainland Southeast Asia such as rubber, palm oil and, more recently, petroleum. Together with its Malayan hinterlands, the colony of Singapore was the largest contributor to the imperial war chest, sustaining hordes of poverty-stricken immigrants from China, India and Southeast Asia. In 1965, independent Singapore was a society still submerged in the kind of feudal relations that characterised the dominant mode of governance reigning contemporaneously in Southeast Asia at large.

The establishment of rational bureaucratic rule was a significant first step in the building of modern Singapore. A full 75 % of output in the manufacturing sector came to be produced by multinationals practising modern forms of management. Nonetheless, family relations in Singapore society continue to be authoritarian, and patriarchic rule is encouraged by state practises (Wee 1995).

Since Singapore achieved political independence in 1965, its economy has expanded tremendously, averaging 8 % growth per annum for the past four decades. These figures yield one of the highest average income levels worldwide, at US\$52,000 per capita, comparable to Switzerland's US\$40,900 GDP per capita (CIA World Factbook 2009). In 2000, some 92 % of the population belonged to the category of homeowners (Singapore Census of Population 2000). Crude birth rates shifted from 21.8 during the early years of industrialisation to 11.4 in 2002. In 2001 the infant mortality rate was 3 per 1,000 live births, compared to Switzerland's 5 (World Development Indicators Database 2003). The labour participation rate of women has expanded from 24.6 % (at the start of Singapore's industrialisation process during the late 1960s) to 53.4 % in 2002 (Report of the Labour Force Survey of Singapore, various years). By the mid-1990s, more women than men were studying in tertiary institutions.

In brief, we summarise below the expectations that respondents have of their fathers as well as of themselves.

First-generation fathers—migrants from China living in a society with low average income and little education—had expectations that reflected the authoritarian, hierarchic values of Chinese feudal society as well as the yet-to-be-rationalised society they were living in. Neither they nor their fathers were conscious of their role as fathers.

Although authoritarian, second-generation fathers—who experienced the rapid economic development of the 1970s—feel they are one up on their own fathers because they view themselves as “responsible” breadwinners. However, this is accompanied by an unvoiced need for intimacy with their children. Their children perceive them as “dictatorial, negligent fathers who love their work more than their families”. Where second-generation respondents are sympathetic with their hard-working fathers, third-generation respondents are harsh in passing judgement on fathers who spent much of their time working.

Apart from the mainstream authoritarian fathers of the second generation, one also sees the emergence of a small group of “new fathers” rooted in the tertiary-trained elite educated in English. They represent the class that has imbibed fresh new expectations of democratic and intimate communication ideals, and they are fortunate enough to be able to put their desires into practise because they possess the necessary cultural and economic resources. The emerging theme of open communication and mutual disclosure noted amongst these new fathers translates, at the third generation, into expectations of an expanded role of “father as friend”.

With the rise in education level over three decades of economic prosperity and a better-endowed education system, young third-generation fathers are confident of their role as fathers. Their primary desire is for intimacy and firmness when relating to their children.

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## Generations of Children and Their Fathers

This section relies on the generational approach to trace changing patterns in expectations about fatherhood. The research first examines how present-day grandfathers remember their own

fathers, and then investigates how these grandfathers conceived of, and actually played out, their role as fathers. The mode of comparing generational expectations is extended to the third generation to examine how fathers of each generation see their own role in comparison to their fathers in the previous generation.

### First-Generation Fathers: Absent Breadwinners

Images of fatherhood described in this section were compiled from interviews with first-generation immigrant fathers in Singapore who are now grandfathers, aged 75–86 years. They were all young immigrants originating mostly from rural parts of southern China, particularly from the provinces of Fukien and Guangdong. By their late teens, they had already settled into arranged marriages; and most have had more than five children.

Collective impressions of first-generation fathers as presented by their sons were that their fathers were “invisible” in regards to their family. Ng Jr, now age 54, uses the terms “lousy father” and “distant” to describe his father:

He never beat me nor scolded me. No tangible love or concern was shown by him. We hardly communicated with each other as he spent most of his time and money with his friends outside, gambling, and left my mother to look after us ... The only time he brought me to the cinema was to watch “Born Free” ... it was too easy and no stress at all (in reference to Ng Sr’s role as father).

Bah Jr, the 56-year-old son of another first-generation father, observes that his father held a casual attitude towards his family obligations and did not bother to perform his duty as a father. He adds, “One cannot choose your parents, nor can they choose their children ... You’ve just got to live with it, your *ren ming* (fate)”. Bah Sr did not allow his son to go to college, but Bah Jr does not hold this against him. “Just doing my job as eldest son”, he says.

Due to the high rate of unemployment endemic when Bah Jr was a schoolboy—around 15 %—fathers worked at a number of jobs, often

irregularly. Both Ng Jr’s parents were hawkers of local cakes and sweets. They spent all their time trying to make ends meet, while Ng Jr and his seven siblings played together unsupervised.

Apart from work, “it was the custom for men to spend their leisure hours outside, hanging around with friends, chatting, drinking and gambling”, says 82-year-old Tan, who has eight sons. (His two daughters were not included in this reckoning.)

Ng Sr, age 87 years, has this to say of his own father:

My father was not around most of the time. He cared more about his drink. Even when he was around, he was in a stupor, so he did not talk to us ... he was a stranger who only came home drunk, to sleep. “Bo-guan” (“could not be bothered” in Hokkien dialect) about us. ... at least I took care of my family ... they have food on the table, new clothes to wear on New Year’s Day, and all of them get to go to school. I have done my duty as father.

Though all first-generation fathers interviewed think of themselves as breadwinners supporting their wives and children, most of them were incapable of properly sustaining their large families without the help of their wives. Ng Jr elaborates, “Our Chinese New Year clothing depended on the money Ma made selling kueh-kueh (cakes). But somehow each year, we got our annual New Year clothes”. As his father did not earn much, his mother had to supplement his income by sewing dresses. “Ma was the source of comfort and strength as she struggled to hold the family together”.

Nonetheless, they were still considered good fathers, as confirmed by Tan Jr, a 56-year-old teacher: “My father was generally a good father because he brought home some money, leaving the rest of family matters to my mother”. His mother had to supplement the family income by doing a neighbour’s laundry in the daytime and working as a seamstress at night.

Apart from contributing substantially to the family income, wives were solely responsible for the children, as revealed by Teh Sr (77 years of age). He left the running of the household and the disciplining of the children to his wife. “*Bo pien*” (‘can’t be helped’ in Hokkien dialect), there were so many children, I could only think about earning enough money for the family. Where was the

time to look after the children? It's a woman's job", he says.

Tan Sr sees children as "burdens of the mother".

Despite their heavy responsibilities, wives had to remain submissive to their husbands. Ng Sr insisted that the man of the house had to have unquestioned obedience from his family. He did not want any trouble from his wife or children. He says, "Children should not be seen or heard ... fathers know best ... what I say, you do. Don't ask why. The man should be unquestionably obeyed".

No member of the family raised any objections to his rule.

Echoing his sentiments is grandfather Tan Sr from the same generation, who says that whenever any of the children were around to inevitably irritate him, he would "slap them on the face or beat them with a wooden stick on the bum".

Teh Jr (age 53) describes his father as authoritarian, bad-tempered and fierce. The children were all terrified of him. "He just had to give us his withering look and we would shiver", he recalls. His father communicated with his children primarily through scolding, threats and commands. The fact that he never beat them was due more to neglect than kindness, since he relegated this duty to his wife. Teh Jr uses the word "duty" to express his relationship with his father. This is not surprising, given that his father's sole means of communication was reprimands. In fact, Teh Jr portrays his father as never displaying any gesture of affirmation towards him. However, he did overhear his father boasting to his neighbour that his son had been accepted to study at the teaching college and was thus on his way to becoming a teacher, a considerably high-status position for that time.

While most children experienced physical thrashing from first-generation fathers, daughters had a much more difficult time. Due to lack of resources and traditional beliefs, female children were often denied access to education and other amenities and were subject to restrictions on where they could go.

Mrs Peh, now a 43-year-old homemaker, grew up in the 1950s with three younger brothers and an elder sister. During that time she was expected to

show absolute obedience to her father regardless of whether she was right or wrong, on pain of physical punishment:

Girls during my time were not as fortunate as girls today. We had no right to speak up in the family ... We were often bullied and teased by our boys, and we were always expected to obey male authorities—our fathers when we were young and husbands now that we are married.

It was no good to be born a girl during my time ... my father favoured and doted on my brothers rather than my elder sister and myself ... Daughters were given up to primary education, while brothers were allowed to continue until tertiary level.

When I was in primary school, I was one of the top students in my class. If I'd had a chance, perhaps I would be a university graduate now! ... my dad was the provider, so he had the loudest voice ... and everyone had to obey him. Acting upon information provided by snooping neighbours, dad caught me shopping with my boyfriend (now husband) when I was 18 years old. I was given a terrible caning. He accused me of disgracing the family and causing him to lose face by going out with someone without my parents' permission ... but I don't blame him for the lifelong beatings and scolding. You can say it's fated when you're born into a traditional family. At least he was a responsible father because he brought back the bread and supported the family.

Unlike the more privileged sons, daughters were given scant attention and were even considered a waste of resources because they became "outsiders" to their family of origin after marriage. Their reproductive potential would belong to the family of their husbands, as the children would bear the name of their husbands.

Based on the various narratives above, it can be concluded that despite indulging in unsavoury activities such as drinking and gambling, first-generation fathers upheld a specific role for themselves, compared to some of the fathers in the previous generation who did not seem to be at all conscious of themselves as fathers. First-generation fathers had a sense of responsibility, as expressed through their generalised acceptance of the role of father as breadwinner. They were critical of the fact that their own fathers did not have a conscious sense of this role. They perceived their own fathers as vacuous, leaving behind only memories of harsh beatings and black mood swings.

As “responsible” breadwinners, first-generation fathers struggled to make a living in what was then Singapore’s underdeveloped economy, with rampant unemployment. Despite criticising their own fathers for being autocratic, harsh and distant, second-generation respondents gave measured confirmation that their fathers had worked very hard as responsible providers, even as they acknowledged that what their fathers provided was not adequate to sustain their large families. Without the supplementary activities of their mothers, children would have had great difficulty surviving on the rather meagre provisions afforded by their fathers’ low income. The ideal of the “responsible breadwinner father”, which was initially voiced by first-generation fathers, had become firmly established among members of the second generation. Such a notion was reinforced by Singapore’s interventionist state, which sought to establish rational-bureaucratic rule and shape a self-reliant citizenry. A major task was to build the family as the foundational unit of social security for the whole society.

Nearly 90 % of Singapore’s population live in state-organised housing that workers buy into on long lease. The aim of responsabilising workers in this way has engendered success, for workers who have to pay off long-term mortgages tend to think twice before deviating from socially sanctioned behaviour. Singapore has the lowest rate of industrial conflict in the industrialised world.

The next section shows that authoritarian and distant father-child relationships have been replaced by a more reflective and questioning orientation of second-generation fathers regarding their relationship with their children. Among this generation, the concept of father as breadwinner is now taken for granted.

### **Second Generation: Authoritarian Providers Retain Authority, Commodify Love, and Practise Silent Intimacy**

Social historians investigating the revolt against patriarchy in North America have compared earlier classical ideals of formality and emotional restraint with the growing idealisation of

companionship and emotional closeness between children that developed in the eighteenth century. Patriarchy was further eroded by changing demographic patterns during this period, such as the levelling of age difference between couples, reduction of birth rates, and women’s participation in the labour force, as well as overall economic development. Additionally, the attack on patriarchy came about as part of the larger assault against the existing patronage society and its associated vertical bonds of dependence.

New economic and social developments in Singapore led to incipient changing mind-sets there as well. As bureaucratic institutions were being developed as part of the newly independent country’s apparatus of production and governance, calls were heard for greater individual autonomy. These demands occurred in spite of the constant battery of state exhortations praising the family as the repository of traditional values and stability.

The approach taken for this study combines micro-data from in-depth interviews with macro-level information on changing economic and demographic patterns. Such patterns include three decades of workers’ income rising about 4 % per annum, rising numbers of educated and working women, and smaller families as a result of the government’s two-child policy. Taken together, the micro- and macro-data yield a more holistic picture of how structural changes interact with individual agency to influence the quality of father-child relationships for individual families.

Data from this study show second-generation fathers displaying the early beginnings of a new version of fatherhood. Fathers of the previous generation were not reflexive about their role. Says Teh Jr of his father, “He did not have a parenting style to speak of anyway, I did not get to see him much”. Given upbringings in which their fathers were largely absent, most sons were forced to search on their own for suitable modes of fathering.

Some carried on as authoritarian fathers because that was all they had experienced growing up. However, painful personal memories coupled with a desire to counteract the state’s interventionist measures into family life compelled many to instigate a search for a softer mode of fathering.



Though previous experiences of harsh punishment did have the effect of diminishing authoritarianism as the dominant mode of father-child relationships, such moderating effects developed only gradually within subsequent generations. Most second-generation fathers allege they wanted to do better for their children by avoiding mistakes and giving their children more opportunities than they themselves had experienced. In fact, a major point reiterated by fathers of this generation is their desire to grant their own children more freedom. More significant is that all fathers in this generation express a strong desire for intimacy with their children. Sadly, many lack the disposition or skill to do so. As Teh Jr says, "I do not really know how to express my love for my two daughters apart from giving them freedom to decide on their career path and choice of life partners".

Thus, even as they take their own fathers to task for being distant and remote, second-generation fathers tend to reproduce variants of this authoritarian style. Lest we judge too quickly, however, we should attend to what Jake, a 59-year-old retired assembly-line worker, has to say:

My father was a very traditional man who believed that it was a father's responsibility to beat his children if they made any mistakes. If he did not do so, he would not be considered a good father... whenever any of us made a mistake, we would get a harsh beating... this affected the way I bring up my own children.

Although Jake himself generally left the disciplining of the children to his wife because she was not working at that time, he did not hesitate to intervene when the children made mistakes, and he often ended up giving them a severe scolding. He confessed to wrestling with his anger so as to avoid hitting them, as he believed that such violence would not solve any problems. Despite his good intentions, however, Jake could not get his children to confide in him, something he attributes to his "stern" looks.

Consequently, whenever the children had problems or wanted to ask permission for something, they would approach their mother, and she would inform her husband. Likewise, whenever Jake disagreed with his children over something,

he would tell his wife. She would then pass on the message to their children. Jake admits that sometimes he found it difficult to relate to his children directly and rues that he did not know how to fully express himself to them. One way out was to buy them things they needed or desired. He would also take them out for dinners or walks at the neighbourhood shopping centre.

Jake's experience illustrates two "relating strategies" used by other second-generation fathers. The first is to enlist their wives as intermediaries to help them express their emotional closeness in indirect relationships with their children. The second is to use the purchase and giving of mass-produced commodities as expressions of the father-child relationship. The account of Teh Jr's daughter Mei reinforces this view. She recalls that her father expressed concern for his two daughters mostly through practical deeds. For instance:

... he never spent money on himself but would lavish what little he had on us, his children and his wife. I will always remember his willingness to return to the shopping mall 10 miles away to get a Garfield soft toy even though we had just returned home from the mall. He could not openly demonstrate his love for us in words or physical gestures, but I know that he loves us. He showed us this through sacrifices of time and energy. No matter how busy he was, he would do his best to make us comfortable, like taking us to the doctor when we were ill.

Apart from not having a model to follow, fathers of this generation admit to being afraid that close proximity and intimacy would expose their weaknesses to their family and, as a consequence, cause them to lose their authority. It can be concluded that the notion of father as authority figure is still revered. But with women's increasing presence in the workforce, as well as state-imposed family planning regimes ("stop at two" on pain of punitive sanctions such as low priority in choice of schools for the children), the male's role of keeping the family in good order came under slow erosion.

Failure to communicate intimacy to their children has caused this generation of fathers much frustration and anguish. Sometimes these fathers have just let the problem fester as they have been too caught up with their work. Meng, a 52-year-old

businessman who makes frequent work-related trips to China, explains that because his father demanded absolute obedience from the children, with no room for compromise, he lived in fear of his father and therefore tried to keep his distance. "This has taught me to be more open-minded with my own children ... I give them lots of freedom", he says. But part of his reason for not disciplining them could stem from his own busy work schedule, which includes entertaining clients and keeping up with paperwork. He says that it is hard for him to be a father as it entails shouldering financial responsibilities as well as taking care of the children. He says that if he does not work hard enough someone more capable may overtake him, so he really has no choice.

His children complain that he should spend more time with them. To meet their needs, he often phones them from the office, even when he is in China. Meng tries in various ways to mitigate the problems caused by his constant absence from home. For instance, before leaving on business trips, he goes through the ritual of taking his children out to dinner. On his return, he gives them presents. However, this has not worked out as he wished, as the children began viewing him as an ATM or Father Christmas. His children do not feel close to him, and he knows this. They only approach him for a reward when they attain good results in their exams. And, despite his assurances that they can come to him if they have problems, "never once have they done this", he says. He gets to know about their problems only through his wife. He is trying to improve the situation, but intimacy with his children still eludes him. His children are not fearful of him, but neither do they express enthusiasm to come close to him. His three sons normally discuss their problems with one another and seek solutions on their own.

Without a doubt, the seeds of the desire for a closer relationship with their children have already germinated within second-generation fathers. Unable to satisfy this desire in everyday life, whether due to preoccupation with economic survival or because of awkwardness with this untried new mode of relating to their children, fathers have resorted to indirect means such as using their wives as intermediaries or by personalising

commodities (i.e., putting in energy and time as part of the labour of love so commodities bought from the market will bear their mark of identity) so as to re-create a more intimate relationship with their children (Carrier 1990, p. 592).

## New Fathers

The rise of female employment and the force of feminist critique of the distant breadwinner have combined to push for co-sharing and a new ideal of the involved "new father" (Gerson 1993; Coltrane 1994). This term is synonymously used with the concept of "highly involved dads" (Pleck and Pleck 1997, p. 45). Pleck and Pleck have attributed the emergence of this new dimension of the modern dad to the egalitarian relationship between husbands and wives called for by feminism.

New fathers in Singapore are a rarity. Examining the details of three such cases would help characterise this new phenomenon, which some writers say is more a myth than reality (LaRossa 1988).

Thirty-six-year-old Benny was trained as an accountant. However, he decided to take on the job of a primary school teacher, a less demanding job that entailed a lower pay (albeit much higher than what a working-class worker can command). His wife, on the other hand, does research in finance and earns much more than he does. His reason was that he wanted to care for his seven-year-old only daughter and indulge her childhood fantasies. Coming from a large family with 11 children, Benny says that his siblings had to parent one another. His hawker father was very busy, scarcely making enough to feed them all. Some of his siblings never even made it to school, due to financial difficulties. Benny does not want his daughter to experience the deprivation he had. He certainly will not take his father as the role model. He has assigned himself an expanded role to include emotional support for his daughter and helping his wife with housework, an image of the new father that corresponds closely to that projected by current literature.

However, fathers such as Benny are rare in Singapore as in other advanced industrialised

countries. A comparison of 10 European countries found that “the option of a child-induced career disruption continues as the normal case for the mother and a special case for the father” (Hearn et al. 2002, p. 18). It is interesting that despite the “asynchrony” between the culture of fatherhood and its conduct, we have managed to pick up in our purposive sampling not a few variant cases of new fathers for this study. The oldest in this group is around 50 years of age, while all of them have a tertiary education. This provides them the flexibility to trade time with their families with work time and remuneration. Unfortunately, this flexibility is not available to the working-class father.

Other characteristics of the new father are embodied by 50-year-old Thian, who is a company director and has a postgraduate degree in mechanical engineering:

I do not want my children to see me as an authoritarian figure. I believe that the relationship between father and children should be based on love, friendship and understanding, and not on status. ... I respect the viewpoints of my children and will let them make their own decisions ... silent intimacy is meaningless, ... a father has to show physical affection towards his children as it shows love and encouragement. When my children do something that makes me proud, I praise them instead of rewarding them with material incentives.

Another father who characterises the new father is banker Ng, age 47 years. Despite the intensified global competition that has made many middle-class jobs vulnerable and insecure, Ng still has access to a flexible work schedule. He tries to get home by 8 or 9 p.m. On weekends, he normally takes his family out for meals, shopping or to the golf club. His diligence has paid off as Ng Jr (a 19-year-old polytechnic student) says he would not want to change any part of his father, whom he describes as “thoughtful, caring and fun-loving”. Ng Sr says that due to his job handling foreign exchange and global money markets, he is on 24-hour (standby and reachable on his mobile phone should his staff suddenly need him). However, he knows most of his son’s likes and dislikes (golf, basketball, Internet surfing, Japanese comics, the sports channel on TV), including not having enough food in the

house! Ng Sr says that he has declined a more demanding job position, a promotion, because he wants to spend more time with his son before he gets called up for National Service.

In a similar vein, accountant Tham, age 50, feels that a family is happy only if family members have open communication. “There is no such thing as one-way thinking”, he says. Both Tham and Thian want to be different from their own fathers, who did not care much for the education of their sons. They therefore read books to improve their style of parenting. Tham reads avidly and listens closely to radio programmes featuring family matters.

New fathers are mindful of the differences in personality among their children. Accordingly, they set out to customise more appropriate ways to connect with them. For instance, 44-year-old engineer Low says that while he tries to be a good listener and jokes openly with his son, he has to be careful with his daughter, who is often moody. Nonetheless, he likes hugging his children, one of only three Chinese fathers who admits to doing so.

While these cases resemble the archetypal new father as described by scholars such as Pleck and Pleck (1997), they are atypical of fathers in general. However, they seem to herald broader transformations yet to come due to the current policy of further integrating Singapore’s economy and society into the dominant model of global capitalism. The age of these fathers betrays some connection of this phenomenon to Singapore’s industrialisation beginning at the end of the 1960s, for new fathers above 50 years of age are rare and confined to the tertiary-educated. More new fathers are found among the third generation, especially among young working-class fathers.

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## Straddling Generations and Handling Transitions

Transition for second-generation fathers is neither easy nor smooth. A minority just drift, hoping to survive as best they can; but the majority try to substitute their negative past experiences with a better present and future.

Second-generation fathers grew up at the time when Singapore had just attained political independence. The government had initiated a massive building and restructuring exercise to grow an efficient and rational state bureaucracy. Rhetoric idealising authoritarianism combined effectively with techniques for shaping of citizens to become self-responsible. The result was the production of the most undemanding (not rights-conscious) and obedient citizens who could easily be ruled from a distance. In the words of Burchell (1993, p. 271), "the rationality of government must be pegged to a form of the rational self-conduct of the governed themselves".

The authoritarian mode of family relationship familiar to the second generation was externally buttressed by similarly unflinching commands emanating from a centralised state. Until the end of 2004, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was still spouting the need for a "strong government". Apart from the general atmosphere of coercion (Tremewan 1994), the dominant mode of authoritarian governance not only reified hierarchy and steep power differential within the family, it also served to slow down the denouement of this old mode of father-child relationship despite Singapore's rapid entry into the global economy. Instead of exemplifying the benefits of democratic relations, the state fuelled fears that democracy would only bring chaos and instability. There was little chance that alternatives could surface to pose as new models of behaviour.

For those who experienced harsh beatings while being largely ignored by their fathers, the question is, how have they managed their struggle to be good fathers to their own children? Not all the interviewees weathered well the wrath of their fathers. Not surprisingly, all resolved to be good fathers to their children.

Obviously, there are fathers who persist with a firm belief in authoritarianism. Apart from the minority with inadequate personalities, most fathers express a desire to be responsible providers. Authoritarian fathers like Nyew are very sure how they will father their children. Even then, they can get stressed when confronted by their teenage sons. Nyew is a 50-year-old warehouse

supervisor. He is the epitome of the conventional authoritarian father supporting an extended family comprising a stay-at-home wife, obedient children and parents (now in their 70s). He hides his gentleness and vulnerability, portraying himself as stern and strict to his children, a son aged 14 and a daughter aged 16. His is a strategy commonly espoused by second-generation fathers to prevent their children "climbing over my head". Quoting from R. Allestree, who condemns parents who "think they must never appear to their children but with a face of dourness and austerity", Stone (1979, p. 412) reads the "fading away of symbolic acts of deference from children" as evidence of the growing solidarity between parents and their children, actually signalling the beginning of a more affectionate approach to parenting.

But for Nyew, who holds tight to the idea that a son is an asset who will eventually look after his aged parents and bring glory to the family name, the growing rebelliousness of son Kevin is indeed "troubling". Kevin says he is afraid of his father so he tries to stay out of his way. He dislikes his father probing into his affairs (though it must be admitted that his father gives him reasonable leeway to surf the Internet and call his friends, as long as he finishes his homework) and wanting to know his reason for staying out late (after midnight), who his friends are, and the Web sites he visits. He feels stressed by his father's expectations and constant monitoring. In retaliation for suffering these irritations, he replies curtly, to discourage conversation flowing between them. Ironically, daughter Cindy feels neglected and jealous of the attention and privileges focused on her brother. On balance, she admits that her dictatorial father's over-concern about her brother gives her some privacy and space, though she is also prohibited from dating or going out at night. Her father's expectation is that "a girl should stay home and help her mum rather than hang around outside with friends".

Even for fathers who wish to depart from the archaic authoritarian mode of relating with their children, it is difficult to get it right. Eng, a self-employed 52-year-old manager with an "O" levels education, was aware of the trail of trial and error

he traversed with his children. His mother used to chase the children with a cane to get them to study, whereas he and his siblings were more interested in catching fish from the monsoon drains. Eng does not like the idea of tightly controlling his own son and daughter (ages 18 and 22 respectively) because it did not work for him and only put him off learning. He believes in open communication with his children, allowing them to set their own targets. However, he reveals that he was sometimes disappointed and driven to desperation, especially with his son's behaviour. It was then that he questioned whether harsher methods would have been more effective. At one time, he feared that his rebellious son would go astray even though he was open to his views and did not want to be a dictator. After repeated advice, his son seems to have improved over the years, and his daughter has outgrown her childish tantrums.

Forty-two-year-old Teng, a father of two daughters (ages 12 and 11 years), is also caught between two styles of parenting. He had to decide whether to select the authoritarian father model, which many of his peers had adopted, or be a more relaxed and liberal father, something he was exposed to during his undergraduate days in the United Kingdom. His decision was to straddle both models, as he believed there were merits to both: Being too strict may set a wedge between father and child, whereas being too relaxed might spoil the children. His wife was initially unsure about the "hybrid" style but was reassured after seeing the effect this was having on her children. Both children have grown more mature than their peers. However, both parents note that the girls are becoming more independent and holding to their own opinions. Teng, although welcoming this as a healthy trend, confides that he is starting to feel redundant as a father. His greatest fear is that the girls could become so independent that they no longer need him, turning to him only when they need money. His daughters, however, refute his paranoia, saying, "We love him very much and can't even begin to imagine the time when we will be without him, so his fears are wholly unfounded". Upon hearing this, Teng was visibly comforted.

### Third-Generation Young Fathers

Unfortunately, our sample of young fathers does not include any from the middle classes. This under-sampling of young married middle-class males could be because any sensible young person in today's competitive world would continue their education to the tertiary level instead of settling down to start families—if they had the economic support.

As for the young working-class fathers studied, they seem to know precisely what they want for their children. They manifest less of the ambivalence characteristic of second-generation fathers, who tend to waver between being authoritarian and treating their children with more freedom and respect.

For instance, Naresh, a 22-year-old third-generation father, could not be more adamant that love and respect for children are a priority for him. He has an eight-month-old boy. His mother died when he was five. He grew up not knowing right from wrong because his father neglected and never corrected him. The only time he got beaten was when his father was either stressed over work or drunk. He thus grew up by trial and error and got involved in shoplifting, truancy and fighting. The only good role models he knew were through watching TV soap operas. At 16, he joined a gang whose members became like family to him. He ended up identifying closely with them to the extent of landing in jail twice with his "brothers". In the gang, he found solace, self-esteem and confidence, which he never got from his home, a home populated by strangers such as his stepmother and a seldom-present father. He adopted an "if you can do it, why can't I?" attitude, taking up smoking and drinking.

At 15 years of age he dropped out of school. Since his father never bothered about how he fared in school, he too decided it did not matter; and since his father never displayed love for him, he grew up a stranger to this emotion. It was only after he met his lover that the meaning of love came alive for him. Now, as a father, he wants to keep his family close through love and intimacy.



Nonetheless, he says he will discipline his children when they are young so they will not be led astray. He intends to try his best not to replicate the mistakes of his father.

Nineteen-year-old Muslim Harun lived a life that reflected the bleak childhood suffered by Hindu Naresh. Neglected and violated by an “irresponsible” father who was overwhelmed by having to support six children and a non-working wife, Harun’s father expected his eldest son to leave school to help support the family. So he quit secondary school after two years. By 13 years of age, he had his father’s careless outlook and bad habits of drinking and smoking. At 16 he made the decision to leave home and live with his girlfriend. She represented one way out of a disruptive family life, which involved his father often attacking his mother when he was drunk. But, unlike Naresh, Harun had apprehensions that he might end up like his father because his father’s were the only lessons he had received on fathering. All he can say now is that he wants intimacy in his family, unlike what he experienced in his own childhood.

Meng, a 24-year-old odd-jobber (with only two years of secondary school education), explains that he does not imitate his father’s hot-tempered way of disciplining him, although he respects his father because he knows he genuinely cares for him:

He speaks harsh words, but deep inside, he cares. For example, when I was a young child, after he caned me he’d bring me some ointment to apply, but he never admitted his wrong ... For myself, ... I explain to my daughter why I carry out certain actions, why she should not do certain things, because there is a price to pay if she repeats her mistakes — instead of losing my temper without telling her why.

This section on third-generation fathers captures only a working-class sample. The reason is that at this time and stage of Singapore’s development, young males who have taken on the responsibility of fatherhood are more likely to originate from the working class; most middle-class families can afford or have expectations that their young male children will continue with their education to the tertiary level.

## Economic Resources Mediate Father–Child Connections

As mentioned previously, new fathers are rare in our sample of three generations. The oldest new father is tertiary-educated. He is a second-generation father. As a whole, it can be said that second-generation middle-class fathers display ambivalence and confusion rather than new father characteristics as foretold by the likes of LaRossa (1988) and Griswold (1993). Nonetheless, middle-class fathers are more likely to be early adopters of new father traits because they have a higher probability of getting acquainted with the economic and cultural developments of the globalised, electronically connected world. In 2002 Singapore was ranked by the World Economic Forum as amongst the top 10 nations for network readiness.

In the preceding section, third-generation working-class fathers are revealed as open and frank to admitting they value key attributes commonly held by new fathers. In contrast, older working-class fathers come across as reticent and indirectly putting down any desire for intimacy with their children. They often ask what else is expected of them after they have provided for their children. It would seem that the divide separating fathers of different classes is not all that clear-cut, at least in terms of the idealised notions they hold regarding family happiness. Age and generational differences can obfuscate how class shapes desirable modes of conduct for fathers.

Even though social historical studies have shown that the marginal existence of working-class families has taken a toll on working-class fathers (Griswold 1993; Tentler 1979), not enough has been done to stress this aspect of fatherhood while policy makers continue to denigrate the irresponsibility of working-class fathers.

In this study the most obvious class differences seem rooted in the types of jobs held, because from this comes the way day-to-day life is lived as well as accessibility to resources for the making of fathers, that is, the material process of building their fatherhood dreams in real life. Their higher job value allows middle-class fathers greater

flexibility to reschedule their work and family time, for instance, continuing their work after putting the children to bed. They therefore have choices not available to the working-class father.

At this juncture in Singapore's development, father-child love is expressed primarily through the provision of material goods. Despite not being able to openly express their loving emotions to their children, some authoritarian fathers have succeeded in conveying their love to their children, thanks to silent intimacy and commodification of love, because they are now more affluent. Working-class fathers seem destined to express themselves to their children only through material provision, for the simple reason that they have very little control over their working life. With the recent downturn (since the 1998 Asian financial crisis), working-class and even middle-class fathers may not even have this anymore as retrenchment figures have inched up to a historic high of 5–6 %. Prior to this economic crisis, jobs were plentiful, and anyone who wanted to could get employment.

The youngest son (age 20) of Fang (age 58) loves and respects his father as a breadwinner and figurehead. But Fang Jr admits that his relationship with his father is distant: "I think I can live without him in my life at this moment in time". Fang Sr, previously a driver, is now retired. After returning home in the evening, he reads the papers, watches television and relaxes.

He rarely took the family out. The only time he was with the children was when they sat together watching television. But they hardly spoke to one another. Fang Jr says that his father is not an easy person to talk to because he never encouraged his children to talk to him or to question his authority. He was careful at all times to maintain them in a submissive position. He also spoke to them through the cane. Now that Fang Jr is older, the distance has widened, since the children are involved in their own activities.

Whereas Fang Jr wishes he could chat with his father, Fang Sr does not seem to see this as a problem, saying that he has performed his duty as father because his children can now care for themselves. It is now their duty to take care of him. To him, the roles of father and son are tied to

duty and responsibility. The idea of being a friend to his son did not occur to him at all. And now it is too late.

Because Fang Jr is now in the army, he spends less than four hours a week with his father. "We exchange fewer than five sentences in a week", he says. In fact, "I would rather be left alone", he says, echoing the views of another son of an economically disadvantaged father, Chan (age 59, a pump attendant).

Twenty-two-year-old Chan Jr is visibly discomfited talking about his father. He finally reveals that he thinks Chan Sr does not deserve to be a father because he is not able to support the family comfortably with his meagre salary. Even the four-room flat where they are currently living is an inheritance from his grandmother. Chan Jr feels ashamed that due to his father's inadequacy as a breadwinner, the family has to get an allowance from his uncle, which is a blow to his pride. So accustomed is Chan Jr to the distance from his father that he does not feel any need to bridge the gap between them. His father is not at all anxious about his two sons, saying that it was better for them to learn on their own rather than for him to teach them about life.

It looks as though Chan Sr feels inadequate in the face of his son, who is now an undergraduate at a local university. He feels guilty over not being able to provide for his family the way the average father does. Chan Sr works regular hours, returning from work at 3 p.m. after the morning shift or at 10:30 p.m. after the afternoon shift. When in the house, he involves himself in cleaning the home or watching television. He took the family out to theme parks and movies when the children were younger, but the outings became rarer as the children grew up and got involved in their own activities. It could also be that with the children's higher education, Chan Sr can no longer meet their intellectual needs and the children have begun to look down on him for holding a menial job.

When they first became fathers, even low-income fathers such as Tiong, a baker's assistant, were both ecstatic and apprehensive. "I knew I had to struggle on for my new son, and I was happy because he was my mother's first grandchild and

it turned out to be a boy”, Tiong says. His wife recalls he had a good relationship with his son, Da, until he entered secondary school. “Now they do not communicate but only quarrel. Only my breakdown stopped his caning”, she says. Tiong (now age 45) is forlorn and puzzled as to why his son (now age 15), with whom he perceived he had a good relationship, has turned against him:

I can only do so much (he is a subsidised kidney dialysis patient). ... it pains me ... I cannot coach him in his schoolwork. ... I feel useless sometimes. I keep telling him that education is the only way out. I find it hard to blame him because he chose the wrong family to be born into.

Da retorts:

He seldom gives me money to buy stuff, like Tamiya cars (self-assembled cars that cost S\$12 each and can run into hundreds of dollars with accessories, while his weekly allowance is S\$10), CDs and trips to the arcade centres ... and he controls me too much. He also used to hit me, and I hate that ... If he wants me to do well in school then he should make sure I eat enough. ... When I get sick, he gives me a Panadol instead of taking me to the doctor.

He knows his father is ailing and the family is merely surviving. But he adds:

All my friends are doing this, and I don't want to be left out ... I am not the scholarly type. I want to go out to work after my “N” levels. I want money. Money allows me to escape hardships and buy experiences.

For a youngster unable to withstand peer pressure, being short of money can be difficult. Da's flat has only two bedrooms, one of which is leased out to bring in additional income. The flat is therefore a squeeze, with shoes, newspapers, an old television set and a fan all strewn about. The mattress the children sleep on is thrown over a threadbare sofa. Da does not like coming home because the space has been colonised by two stranger-tenants. In addition, he has to witness his parents' constant squabbling over money matters. He finds the toilets at Takashimaya, the premier shopping mall, more luxurious. He is not allowed to watch television or use the phone, to keep the utility bills low. With a weekly allowance of S\$10—“it runs out by Wednesday”—he finds it difficult, because lunch costs S\$2 daily.

Tiong can only groan, “He stays out late. I do not know how to control him”.

There are, however, also stories of successful working-class mobility in our sample of cases. The case of Jaffar, a supervisor and part-time taxi driver, illustrates clearly why working-class fathers hardly have time to speculate or reflect on how they will live their family life. They just push ahead and try their best. Fortunately for 42-year-old Jaffar, his health has held up. With three daughters and a young son to support, he has had to focus all his energies on bringing in enough income to live a “respectable family life”. After the birth of his third child, he plunged into his second job as a nighttime taxi driver. He spent more time with the first two daughters, but after the third child was born he was not able to return home before midnight, when the children were already asleep. And when they left for school the next morning, he was asleep. But he is proud that it is due to his hard work that they could all sleep soundly. His regret is that since he lacked the time to interact with his daughters, he missed seeing them develop: walk, talk or teethe. They are not close to him, perhaps due to fear and unfamiliarity. He comments that maybe it is for the best that his daughters keep their distance from him because closeness may undermine his authority! Nonetheless, he is proud of them as they are now all graduates whereas he himself had very little education. He sees this as the best way they can repay him. He enjoyed dreaming of how he would bring up his children, although some of his expectations were rather unrealistic.

The ideology of the male breadwinner is still strong, reinforced by a patriarchal state and despite the fact that about half of households have working wives. With the emergence of new forms of work and ruthless corporate restructuring, working-class men are vulnerable to new forms of marginalisation (Hearn et al. 2002, 22).

Discussions of the preceding cases showcase stereotypes of the macho man being eroded in the everyday-life context of working-class men. Regular surveys of young couples and singles in Singapore have often turned up enthusiastic responses towards having children and families. The most recent study of 3,000 couples by the

government found that four out of five couples believe the ideal number of children is three. But deterred by the lack of money, time and energy (Streets 17 March 2004, 8), Singaporeans are less than able to reproduce adequately. In 2003, births per resident were 1.26 (Ministry of Finance Press Statement 2 March 2004).

While states have moralised against constituents for not reproducing enough, they have been unwilling to financially support the advancement of pro-natalist goals.

## Conclusion

Employing the approach of grounded theory, this section will attempt to derive some useful generalisations regarding the evolution of father–child relations over the generations, in the context of a rapidly industrialising economy. This chapter’s journey from first- to third-generation fatherhood has seen not only broad and sweeping changes but also abiding themes and vestiges from archaic modes of father–child relations.

The trend towards the development of autonomous personhood [as portrayed in the West by writers such as Aries (1962), Stone (1979)] and intimate family relations can clearly be discerned with the shifting of focus for fathers over the generations. Nonetheless, while the traditional role of the father as keeper of family order was rather resistant to erosion over the generations, neither did new forms of relationships sprout up speedily.

Revelations from first-generation fathers characterise their own fathers as vacuous, cavalier and uncaring. These fathers come across as the archetype of the un-selfconscious mediaeval adult easily given over to the impulses of their instinctual life. Seen by first- and second-generation modern adults as vulgar and irresponsible, they are depicted as “not even having a concept of what a father is”. A response from their children, first-generation fathers who suffered and lived the consequences, is to construct a new image of the responsible breadwinner father.

Living under Singapore’s colonial economy, first-generation respondents struggled, scarcely able to provide for their family without the aid

of their wives. The substantial contribution of wives who worked from home was never given proper acknowledgement by the formal economy. This explains the persistence of the myth coupling the male breadwinner/protector/family head and decision maker. This myth has persisted even though figures reveal that by the 1990s, mothers were providing about 40 % of household incomes.

The idea of the father as provider is one constant that surfaces repeatedly through the generations. What is clear is that fathers actually take seriously the roles assigned them by society, without question. Therefore, it is logical to have them comment, like workers in the Taylorist managed firm, “It is only fair. I have done my provider role; she (wife) must play her homemaker role”. When they have more children to feed, these fathers just work on doggedly, even taking on two jobs. In the extreme, some fathers have even refused the help of wives who want to contribute as wage earners.

Some, like 46-year-old salesman David, have got so caught up in the money chase that they find themselves in an untenable position. He can only retort, “It’s not easy to be a man ... got to provide the 5C’s: cash, car, credit card, condominium, club; on top of that the make of the car ...”

Despite stressful work burdens, fathers often mention they take great pride in knowing that their children can sleep soundly at night because their hard work has brought in an income adequate to support “a respectable family life”.

For second-generation fathers, breadwinning has become more than a given. However, under intense global competition, fathers have ended up having no relationship with their children. Baffled, a few fathers use the word “hate” to express deep repugnance at their fate, of having only an indirect relationship with their children. This is one worrying concern of second-generation fathers. While still clinging to the authoritarian mode of fathering, second-generation fathers have in addition adopted a nascent desire for intimacy. The newness of this emotion makes it difficult to handle and, as such, is often feared because norms of fatherhood have yet to incorporate this element into the repertoire of socially acceptable fathering behaviour.

In general, second-generation fathers have an indirect relationship with their children. They talk to each other through mothers, sisters and grandmothers, who thus occupy a pivotal mediating role. These intermediaries can reinforce their children's view that fathers are negligent or they can make neglect into a good thing by pointing to the fathers' selfless sacrifice for their children. Therefore, some children come away praising their fathers for being good providers even while feeling unloved and neglected.

Phrases such as "actions speak louder than words" have been popularised to justify the father's absence from the family and are never far from the lips of those interviewed: sentiments such as father's sacrifice should be appreciated to sustain his position on a pedestal deserving of respect and deference from his children; his precious time should therefore not be wasted on long-winded explanations as to why he needs to beat them up to uphold family stability.

One businessman father (age 53) recounts how he imitated his father's method of disciplining his children by just caning and then leaving the children in a corner to repent, "to ask Buddha for forgiveness for being unfilial by causing his father to be angry ... This method is time-saving. The children can repent on their own (without any explanation), and I can go on doing my own thing while the fathering job was simultaneously accomplished!"

It is not surprising that this coupling of authoritarianism and efficiency echoes the state's own justification as to why Singapore cannot afford to practise democracy because it will take up too much time and is inefficient. Telling is former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's observation about the 1967 cleaners' strike: "If we do not make them learn, then you and I will suffer. ... wherever anybody gets out of line, we firmly take the rod and say, stop, back into position" (The Straits Times 7 February 1967).

Caning and stern discipline were undoubtedly the dominant modes for handling children during the era of the first generation and their fathers, like during the Victorian period, when the aim was to force childish exuberance into moulds of unquestioned obedience (Walvin 1982). Children brought up this way turned around vowing not to

be dictators to their own children. Yet, because the whole of society was still governed by authoritarianism, it was difficult for these fathers to feel confident they were doing the right thing when they tried to practise liberalism. So they ended up vacillating, causing confusion to their children too.

Only when the third generation became parents do we see the emergence of more confidence in the attainment of balance between strictness and reasoning, reflecting the empathic mode of nurturing (deMause 1974) that underlines adults' increasing ability to dialogue with their children. Third-generation young fathers are unequivocal that family life is about a desire for closeness with both wife and children, whereas the first two generations focused narrowly on being responsible providers respected and feared by their subjects in their privatised kingdom, the family.

True communication as idealised mutual disclosure is not widely practised in Singapore. The primary mode of relating to one another in a close relationship is still silent intimacy (as opposed to "disclosing intimacy, revealing the self and working at knowing and empathising with another", Jamieson 1998, 52). Jamieson reports that silent intimacy "has been and still is extolled in some strands of Euro-North American cultures" (Jamieson 1998, 8). Singapore has just awakened to the fact that silent intimacy is not necessarily the only type of intimacy for expressing primary/close relationships.

Until recently, since fathers were schooled only to be efficient producers in the economy, they were inadequate when it came to holding a decent conversation with their children or wives. So they concentrated on what they were good at—working. Worse, because the state emphasises productivity/efficiency and continuous upgrading of family status as dominant sources of esteem and identity, men (and increasingly more women) tend to concentrate on this area, hoping that the rest will fall into place if all goes well with their career development.

The lack of socio-political institutions supporting democratic debates partially explains the perpetuation of silent intimacy. Coupled with the pervasiveness of consumerism, the provider role combines well with silent intimacy to produce commodification of love. The New Age father is



still a nominal fiction despite wide dissemination of longings for this idealised version of father-family relationship. Instead, the ATM father-child relationship is more commonly found. Unfortunately for the working class, even this might be taken away as they become ever more subjected to the vulnerabilities of erratic business cycles. The globalisation of work intensification has brought a new kind of divide separating fathers and their children. For all classes, this seems to have replaced the remote and distant father-child relationship of old.

Real implications of the commodification of love have not received much attention. In this information age, most children can find the same freedom (all schools have the Internet) to taste the dazzling offers of the postmodern world (usually because the parents are too busy). More fundamental is their common experience of loneliness. A helpline for primary school children reported that boredom and loneliness topped the list of issues children face (The Straits Times Interactive, 22 February 2002). In despair, children like 13-year-old Rajaswari can only envy friends with loving fathers who spend time playing and talking with them or taking them out on weekends. Close to tears, Rajaswari says, "My father loves me more than anything else except for golf. He spends all his free time on it".

Another teenaged child of a well-to-do businessman in the shipping line says:

He always gives me money. Sometimes I wonder if I am his son or a commodity that can be satisfied with material needs, even though I used to enjoy it. ... he is using money (in exchange for love) ... that is why I am spending so much now, hoping he will take note of it such that we can find an opportunity to talk ... television programs also tell that love cannot be purchased with money.

Children may not understand everything, but they do have a sense of what is going on. Says a 14-year-old realist in his heart-rending story:

Because he (his father, a 53-year-old welder working overtime to support the growing needs of his children) is always working, I do not have much time to talk to him ... I feel a wall is building between us ... but it is impossible not to have him work. We are not rich ... I feel bad that despite his age, he still has to work so hard.

Perhaps it is reassuring that the transnational fathers investigated in this study are still concerned with responsible provision for their children and have not marginalised themselves with globalisation (Grillis 2000). Nonetheless, with deteriorating employment conditions in Singapore, policy makers should recognise that "child neglect is now being recognised as a prominent social problem in many countries" (Hearn et al. 2002, p. 24). Singapore needs to pay more attention to this problem.

There is a lot of information on men's relations with home and work (Hearn et al. 2002). This focus is reflected in the most common response received in this study, describing fathers stretching to balance family time with the need to provide materially for their family. A few upper middle class fathers who have the surplus and wherewithal to support their material needs, as well as those with personal integrity and discipline bolstered by religious beliefs, may succeed in attaining intimacy with their children. These are very special people, as disclosed by the handful of children who nominate their fathers as models for emulation.

This exploratory study indicates that even if notions of the new father are found in the sample studied, they are scattered amongst all classes. Since thoughts and anxieties are more difficult to elicit from members of the working class, the tendency may be to view them as unthinking. It also suggests the possibility that data collection methods can affect responses of the less educated such that their ruminations cannot be properly articulated in studies based on surveys.

Nonetheless, class differences are glaring and not difficult to detect. They refer, however, more to material differences that reduce human vision and subvert agency and confidence. Class as a powerful and pervasive force in differentiating access to life resources has broad support in current social science literature (Hendry et al. 1998). Particularly striking in this study are narratives depicting too well what real poverty means to both fathers and children. For fathers who cannot provide even the minimum for their children, loss of control over their children and shame over being unable to provide for them is truly humiliating.

An odd-jobber observes that his status would be even lower than his wife's if he failed to provide for his family. Working-class fathers' focus has to be narrowly concentrated in the pursuit of adequate family income.

The conclusion from this study matches that of Walkerdine and Helen (1989), who remind us that material and social circumstances can render irrelevant buzzwords promoting, for instance, the new father. Their children, on the other hand, suffer spirit-crushing and painful embarrassment brought on by poverty and great difficulty in coping with peer pressure. Innocent of their social environment when younger, these children have to also cope with looming awareness of having an uneducated/low-status father. This is a pervasive problem, especially in a rapidly changing and upwardly mobile society where every generation is more educated and affluent relative to their parents' generation. Conversely, this study has also gathered accounts of fathers ashamed they cannot keep up with their children.

Fathers' relations with the female child seem to have traversed the farthest. Detailed observation discloses that, indeed, it is not so much the dismantling of patriarchy that has occurred but only its remake. For while daughters and sons have relatively equal access to education and jobs, fathers have clung to the idea that daughters' reproductive capacity has to be judiciously guarded. Daughters' new role as producers can only be appended on to their primary role in reproduction, echoing the stand taken by the state to continue to keep women in their secondary status by not prioritising facilities/resources that would give young women a choice of what to make of their lives. Strengthening of women's status may be just a fragile mirage. Under current economic arrangements, the entry of women into the formal economy can only mean that children will lose touch with their mothers as well as their fathers.

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# Moving Fathers from the “Sidelines”: Contemporary Chinese Fathers in Canada and China

# 21

Susan S. Chuang, Robert P. Moreno, and Yanjie Su

Currently, China accounts for approximately 20% of the world's population. With over 1.28 billion people residing within China, as well as millions of immigrants throughout the world (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2008), there is a need for greater insight into contemporary Chinese families. This is particularly important in North America where countries such as Canada and the United States have experienced a vast influx of Chinese immigrants. For example, from 2001 to 2006, immigrants from the People's Republic of China accounted for 14% of the immigrant population in Canada. Overall, the immigrant population rose from 17.9% in 2001 to 19.8% in 2006, the highest increase in 75 years (Statistics Canada 2006a). The United States showed similar immigration patterns. In 2000, over 2.4 million Chinese people lived in the United States (Hernandez et al. 2008). The present growth of both the size and importance of the Chinese and Chinese origin population calls for researchers to better understand contemporary Chinese families. Thus, the

purpose of this chapter is to examine what we believe are important changes in contemporary Chinese families. To illustrate our point, we will focus on fathers to demonstrate the range of variation of fathering roles in families. First, we will provide a historical overview of fathering in Chinese society. Second, we will point to key social changes that have contributed to the shaping of contemporary Chinese families. Third, we will present some findings from our recent research that provides some evidence of the expanding roles and practices of Chinese (from mainland China) and Chinese-origin fathers in Canada. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of social implications and future directions.

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## Historical Overview of Fathering in Chinese Societies

To understand contemporary Chinese families and the role of the father, one must understand the social and historical context. A central tenet of Chinese culture is Confucianism. Confucianism has dominated Chinese ethic for more than 2,000 years, emphasizing interdependence, social harmony, and sacrificing individual needs for the sake of the group (Ho 1987). With respect to the family, Confucianism provides the template for appropriate familial interactions and values. Specific rules of family hierarchy, intergenerational conduct, lines of authority, and respect for the status of others are clearly outlined and applicable throughout one's life (Ho 1981; Tang 1992).

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According to Confucianism, filial piety is the central principle that governs familial roles and interactions. Children are expected to show devotion and obedience to their parents (Miller et al. 1997). Children are to behave in a manner that will bring honor and not disgrace to the family name. For example, one of the filial responsibilities is when children get older, they are expected to provide financial support for their parents (Ho 1996).

Confucianism also specifies parental roles. Mothers' responsibilities focus on issues inside the home such as child care and household duties, whereas fathers' responsibilities are outside the home and are primarily that of the economic provider. Thus, with respect to household matters, fathers are expected to be aloof and distant (Ho 1987; Shek 2001). More specifically, the father's role is defined as "yi jia zhi zhu," (一家之主) translated as "master of the family." This is further illustrated by the *Classic of Filial Piety* (Legge 1879):

Of all the actions of man there is none greater than filial piety. In filial piety there is nothing greater than the reverential awe of one's father. In the reverential awe shown to one's father there is nothing greater than making him the correlate of Heaven (p. 476).

With regard to Chinese fathers' parenting role, fathers assume the role of a stern disciplinarian, not engaging in emotional indulgence with their children (Fei 1935; Ho 1987; Wilson 1974; Wolf 1970). The traditional Chinese parenting practices are characterized by the adage, "strict father, kind mother" (Wilson 1974). These distinct roles guide parental obligations and responsibilities in an effort to maintain social order within the family unit.

Historical accounts of family functioning among Chinese families also indicated a qualitative distinction between father-son and father-daughter relationships. Following traditional beliefs, it was believed that the father-son relationship was the most structurally important relationship in the family system. Hsu (1967) defined this form of relationship as the father-son identification where "whatever one is, the other is; and whatever the one has, the other has" (p. 63).

Thus, roles and relationships in Chinese traditions and Confucianism have been clearly delineated for each family member to follow.

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## Social Change and Family Transformation

Over the last five decades, China has undergone numerous social and political changes. These broader sociocultural changes have altered the contextual climate in which families reside, and they have had great impact on family structure and functioning (e.g., Chen and Chen 2012). We have identified three of these changes that we believe have been particularly influential on families and the roles of fathers.

### Social and Political Changes

China's communist revolution had a profound impact on the family. In order to facilitate cultural changes, China instituted specific policies to alter the "traditional" marriage and family relations. A specific effort was made to establish gender equality and the legal interests of women and children. The marriage law of 1950, for example, redefined marital practices. Coerced or arranged marriages were prohibited, and bans were placed on polygamy and child marriages. Marriage was now based on a choice between a man and a woman. The elective nature of marriage was further emphasized with the legalization of divorce (Engle 1984). As a result, the divorce rate in China has been gradually rising, especially in major cities. From 1980 to 1997, the divorce rate increased from 5% to 13%, leading to a gradual decrease in traditional family structure (Ni 2000).

China's "one-child policy" (officially the "family planning policy") was instituted in the late 1970s. The policy was introduced to alleviate social, economic, and environmental problems. Officially, the policy restricted married urban couples to one child. In addition to reducing the number of births, the policy changed the typical family structure. Where previously three to four generations constituted a household, the common



family composition in urban families is now a four–two–one structure (four grandparents, two parents, one child). Currently in urban areas, 95% of the children are “only children” (Chen and He 2004).

## Economic Changes

Historically, China has been primarily an agrarian society with limited resources and a large portion of the population living in poverty. It was not until the early 1980s that China’s economy modernized. China initiated full-scale reforms that targeted various cities and geographic locations, systematically creating a competitive market economy. In less than 20 years, there was a dominance of state-owned enterprises and significant growth of both domestic and foreign private and joint ventures. This economic movement was so successful that China is currently the fourth largest economy in the world, with a growth rate of about 10% per year (Chen and Chen 2012).

Collectively, these changes have altered China’s sociocultural context and reshaped marital and familial relationships. Fathers’ roles in particular have shifted from “master of the family” toward a pattern with more egalitarian relationships between mothers and fathers. As women increased their participation in the workforce, they expanded their role outside the household, which necessitated a corresponding shift in men’s family roles. Moreover, the gender equality laws increased women’s freedom and power within marital relationships, further altering the responsibilities and expectations of men.

Similarly, as a result of the one-child law, the structure of families drastically changed, transforming parent–child interactions. With only one child in the household, family members devoted their entire attention to one child. This unintentionally led to Chinese parenting patterns becoming more similar to other societies with small family sizes. Thus, Chinese families have become “child-centered.” Family resources were concentrated on one child, which included the attention of the father. Far from being aloof, fathers are now described as “spoiling” their children

(Shwalb et al. 2004). The changes are illustrated by recent comparative research. For example, Chen and Chen (2012) surveyed two cohorts of Chinese parents of school-aged children (1998 and 2002). Their findings indicated that over a four-year period, Chinese parents’ decreased their use of power assertion and increased their display of parental warmth when interacting with their children.

Moreover, economic changes, such as the increasingly competitive market economy, inadvertently altered parental child-rearing attitudes and values. Parents are now pressed to socialize their children to adapt and be competent in a new market-oriented climate. Chinese parents have begun to emphasize values such as individual initiative, assertiveness, and self-confidence, which are more in line with the changing economy (Yu 2002). Long-held traditional values such as interdependence, obedience, and cooperation are less emphasized as desired child characteristics. Rather, Chinese parents emphasized similar values of western societies (individual initiative, assertiveness, and self-confidence) that were more adaptational to the market-oriented society (Yu 2002). These new values are echoed in school reforms and educational policies where children are now encouraged to engage in more individualistic activities. For example, Chinese schools have modified their curricula approach (goals, policies, and practices) to prepare their students for a market-driven society. Strategies such as engaging students in public debate, allowing students to make their own decisions about what extracurricular activities to engage in, have been actively implemented (Liu 2003).

These economic and social changes have inevitably transformed family dynamics and parenting processes as well as individuals’ socioemotional functioning. However, few researchers have explicitly explored how these changes have altered parenting practices and beliefs, especially among fathers. With the dynamic nature of parenting and the recent social changes, it becomes necessary for researchers to critically investigate family functioning within the families’ sociocultural contexts. Moreover, many Chinese families are immigrating to westernized countries; thus,

the added complexities of adjusting and adapting to the receiving countries' culture need to be further explored.

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## The Immigration Process

To fully understand contemporary Chinese families across the world, changes in China must be examined in conjunction with recent immigration patterns. With the dramatic influx of newcomers to North America, scholars have been increasingly interested in the pathways in which immigrants change and adapt to their host country. For our purposes here, acculturation is defined as the process of cultural and psychological changes that individuals face as a result of contact with a new culture (see Berry et al. 1989). Specifically, immigrants bring with them their cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors from their country of origin and engage and negotiate a new sociocultural terrain. Specifically, changes in values and corresponding parenting roles and interactions are compounded with the move to a new country.

Since the Immigration Act in the 1960s, Canada has experienced a radical shift in ethno-profiles. Immigration policies being developed on labor market expansion and the family reunification altered the demographic landscape (Palameta 2007). Before the Immigration Act, immigrants came from many countries with diverse national backgrounds, although the majority of immigrants were of European origin (81%). Currently, Canada is experiencing a dramatic change in immigration patterns. Newcomers now enter a more multiethnic and multicultural society with over 200 ethnicities residing in Canada. Before 1971, Asian immigrants accounted for only 7% of the immigrant population. Among those who arrived between 1991 and 1996, over half of the immigrants were of Asian descent (57%) (Massicotte et al. 2001). Chinese families now account for 24% of the visible minorities, making up 3.9% of the total Canadian population (25.5% are Canadian born). Moreover, the last five years have shown a Chinese population increase of 18.2% (Statistics Canada 2006b). Moreover, newcomers, on average, have higher

birth rates than native, Caucasian families (Statistics Canada 2006a). Thus, the immigrant population and their children are growing at a faster rate than are their native Canadian counterparts.

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## Patterns of Father Involvement in Chinese Families

In understanding the importance of contextual factors in family functioning, we believe that it is crucial to reassess the cultural and societal values that influence the dynamics and relationships among Chinese origin families. The numerous societal and demographic changes suggest that we should not over-rely on "traditional" notions of Chinese families as a primary explanation of familial roles and behavior. Despite these changes, researchers continue to draw heavily on Confucianism for explanations of parental roles ("strict father, warm mother"). We believe that this perspective may be narrow and may inadvertently lead to stereotypic characterizations of Chinese origin families, particularly with respect to fathers. Rather, we advocate a broader, more expansive view of the fathers' position and function in today's families.

A number of studies of Chinese fathers suggest that Chinese fathers are harsh and detached from child-rearing responsibilities. For example, an observational study of urban Chinese families in their homes found that fathers spent very little time caring for young children, especially infants (Jankowiak 1992). As a result, fathers lacked experience and competence to care for their children. According to the study, one woman remarked that if "a man held an infant, he might become confused and drop it" (p. 349). This characterization is not limited to father–infant interactions. Shek (1998) reported that adolescents perceived their fathers as less positive, more harsh, and less concerned with their general well-being compared to their mothers (Shek 1998). Similarly, Chinese adults, in general, perceived their mothers as being more warm and less restrictive than their fathers (Berndt et al. 1993; Lau et al. 1990; Shek 1998).

However, other research suggests a somewhat different picture, one where fathers are more engaged and are active participants in child rearing. Findings from a national survey in China showed a clear shift in conceptions of the roles of fathers. Seventy-seven percent of the men believed that men should do half of the domestic work. These fathers also reported higher levels of familial responsibilities and involvement in their children's lives (Chinese National Bureau of Statistics 2001). Others have found that Chinese fathers were involved in various aspects of their children's lives. For example, Abbott et al. (1992) examined fathers (children ranging from infancy to 17 years of age) from China and reported that fathers were equally responsible for helping their children with school work, taking him/her to and from school, disciplining, and taking the child on activities. Moreover, compared to mothers, fathers stated that they were more likely to comfort their children when they were fussy or upset, help the children to solve problems, and teach their children values (Abbott et al. 1992).

In line with these findings, social scientists began to reassess the influence of Confucianism on contemporary families. The evidence of fathers shifting their parental role as "helper" to active co-parent is gaining prominence among nonwestern families as well (see Chuang and Moreno 2008). For example, Lin and Fu (1990) found that for both mothers and fathers of 6- to 7-year-old children, immigrant Chinese-American parents rated themselves as less controlling than their native Chinese counterparts. More recently, Chuang and Su (2008) also found that culture and acculturation factors guided fathers' parenting practices and beliefs. Specifically, regardless of country (China, Canada), fathers generally conceptualized their father roles as more multifaceted, including roles of economic provider, caregiver, playmate, and being responsible for household chores (Chuang and Su 2008). However, immigrant Chinese fathers were more likely to consider their children's interest when making child care decisions, were less authoritarian (e.g., controlling, restrictive) and more authoritative (e.g., promoting independence) than were fathers in China (Chuang and Su 2009a).

Focusing on daily child care decision making, Chuang and Su (2009b) reported that Chinese and immigrant Chinese-Canadian fathers were actively involved in making decisions about their infants' needs. However, some differences were found between families from Canada and China, potentially indicating that immigrant parents re-adjusted their parenting beliefs about the roles of fathers in the family. Specifically, mothers' authority where mothers were making the decisions without the fathers' input was found to be more frequently used among families in China than were Chinese-Canadian families. Chinese-Canadian families, also, may be more open to a "westernized culture," thus opting to immigrate to western countries such as Canada and the United States. Thus, current research suggests that conceptions of family roles change as a function of being exposed to and the integration of the host culture; thus, reinforcing the need for fathering to be understood within the sociocultural context. Moreover, from a family systems perspective, parents and other caregivers are a part of a system of interacting partners, all of whom affect and are affected by each other (Tamis-LeMonda 2004).

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## Cultural and Methodological Considerations

In order for social and behavioral scientists to capture the variations and nuances of a particular ethnic group, families must be understood within their cultural context. For the purpose of this chapter, culture is defined as a set of shared societal values, beliefs, and practices that dynamically structure relationships. Culture is not an objective reality, but rather, is socially constructed. It is fluid, dynamic, and changes as a function of individual, social, and economic factors (Bruner 1990; Super and Harkness 2002).

In the past, researchers have tended to use comparative studies with families of European descent as the "baseline." However, increasingly more researchers are contending that such comparative samples may not be the best way to capture family functioning and processes within a cultural context. Alternatively, researchers must

examine specific ethnic groups on their own terms rather than limiting their focus on comparative research with families of European ancestry (Chuang 2006; Chuang and Su 2008, 2009a, b; Moreno 1991; Phinney and Landin 1998). Such specificity provides a framework to investigate the impact of cultural factors on particular issues and to examine whether current conceptualizations of parenting, which are nested within a Westernized framework, are culturally relevant and applicable to minority groups.

Although our current knowledge of “normative” family functioning is primarily based on middle-class European American samples, the literature on Chinese families is growing, albeit slowly (e.g., see Chao and Aque 2009; Chea et al. 2009; Chuang and Su 2008, 2009a, b; Qin 2009). There has been a re-evaluation of family dynamics, with a particular emphasis on fathering which has gained significant prominence among social scientists. The inclusiveness of fathers and their roles in family functioning leads to a more accurate and comprehensive portrayal of families (see Chuang and Moreno 2008). Unfortunately, in the attempts to broaden our knowledge about fathering, many researchers have relied on mothers and children as informants, rather than fathers themselves. Such strategies have limited our scope of knowledge about fathers and researchers are, although slowly, including fathers as informants (see Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004).

Lastly, everyday life events such as caregiving activities (e.g., changing diapers, feeding the infant) need closer attention since it is the mundane activities that fathers engage in that captures the nuances and complexities of fathering. Such details will then allow researchers to place fathers within a cultural context, rather than limiting the focus on broad dimensions of involvement (i.e., engagement, responsibilities, accessibility). Also, researchers have tended to focus on one particular dimension of fathering which then limits the scope of the complexities of fathering (see Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004). However, we believe that examining the various dimensions of father involvement, as well as the types of activities within each dimension, will provide a greater understanding of *how* fathers are involved in their children’s everyday activities.

## Current Study

For this chapter, we provide some findings from our two-country (Canada and China) investigation of Chinese fathers of young children. To address these issues, we developed a study which examined various dimensions of father involvement (i.e., engagement, responsibilities, accessibility). This study is based on the father involvement model that was developed by Lamb et al. (1987) which has been prominently used among researchers. Lamb et al. conceptually distinguished three types of father involvement (FI): (1) engagement which refers to direct interaction with the child, including care taking and play; (2) accessibility or availability to the child where the father is within earshot distance of the child; and (3) responsibility for the child by ensuring that the child is appropriately cared for and reared (see Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda 2004). Since this model has been primarily based on middle-class European families, it remains unclear as to whether this particular model is relevant for Chinese fathers. Thus, this model provides a unique way at examining everyday activities and the levels of father involvement.

To capture the various dimensions of FI, the Time Diary approach is one of the most advantageous measures. As Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) stated, the advantage of using Time Diary approaches is that it is possible to characterize fathers who may differ in levels of education and employment, and to examine everyday life events. Also, as fathers complete this exercise, fathers are less likely to realize that their social interactions with their children are the focus of the study, thus reducing social desirability bias. Fathers are also less likely to inflate their levels of activities, as some researchers have asked fathers to provide a percentage of time or to estimate over a course of a week, how many minutes they spent doing various activities with their children.

Thus, although few researchers have used this methodological approach (see Lamb et al. 2004) due to the significant amounts of time spent by informants and more so in coding the data (two 24-h recall days), we believe that this measure provides a wealth of information. Such detailed

everyday accounts of fathers' work and nonwork days allowed us to better capture the cultural nuances of FI among IM (Immigrant Chinese-Canadian fathers) and CH (Chinese fathers). Thus, with the use of Time Diaries, our study explores everyday life events of fathers and their involvement in their young children's lives. The findings will provide an opportunity to gain greater detailed accounts of the extent to which fathers are involved in their children's lives. Specifically, the goals of the study are to examine: (1) the broad dimensions of father involvement (levels of engagement, accessibility) as well as the subdimensions (detailed activities such as changing diapers); (2) whether fathers' involvement differs between sons and daughters; and (3) whether sociocultural factors such as country of residency can be linked to fathering behaviors.

## Methods

### Participants

The current study included 68 first-generation immigrant Chinese-Canadian fathers (born in Mainland China) and 52 Chinese fathers from Beijing, China. All fathers were married. For the immigrant fathers, the mean age was 36.81 years of age ( $SD=4.24$ ) and their children were an average age of 1.15 years ( $SD=0.20$ ) (27 boys). Fathers and their children from China averaged 32.98 and 1.06 years of age ( $SD$ 's=3.54, 0.37, respectively) (25 boys). An ANOVA for fathers and their children's ages by country revealed that on average, fathers in Canada were older,  $F(1, 115)=27.03$ ,  $p<0.001$ , but the age of the children did not significantly differ. The fathers' levels of education were generally high across the two countries, with most fathers having attained a university degree.

For immigrant fathers, the years of residency in Canada ranged from six months to seven years ( $M_{\text{years}}=3.78$ ,  $SD=1.39$ ). In terms of employment, most of the Chinese-Canadian and Chinese fathers were employed full-time, except for seven immigrant Chinese fathers who were unemployed. The mean household yearly income for the immigrant Chinese families was \$40,000–\$60,000

CDN per year and \$72,000–\$96,000 YN for the families in China. Thus, families are classified as middle class.

### Procedures and Measures

For the immigrant Chinese-Canadian fathers, they were recruited from churches, Chinese local organizations, local daycare centers, and word of mouth in and around the Toronto metropolitan area. The families in China were recruited in Beijing, China, based on previous contact with the third author of this chapter in the context of earlier research. They were originally recruited through local communities and word of mouth.

First, parents were asked to fill out a Background Information Questionnaire which included information about their date of birth, country of origin, length of residency in Canada (for immigrants), levels of maternal and paternal education and incomes, and age and sex of the targeted child. This form, along with the signed consent form, was given to a trained research assistant (bilingual in English and Mandarin) on the day of the interview.

The Time Diary Recall Activity was conducted in the homes of the participants. This activity is a pen-and-paper task and was based on the detailed time diary recall method developed by Robinson (1977). Fathers were first prompted to identify their last workday and non-workday. For example, if the research assistant was interviewing the father on Saturday and the father worked Friday but not Sunday, Friday would be designated as the workday, and Sunday as the non-workday. Fathers were then instructed to list a minute-by-minute account of their daily activities. Fathers were instructed to focus on all the social interactions at home. Each day started and ended at midnight, a 24-hour account of a full day. The activities were listed in chart form with columns to make it easier for fathers to recall their two days. Fathers were asked to include: what they were doing and with whom, room location, and if they were engaged in any other activity. For example, a father would report that from 6:30 to 7:00 a.m., he changed his daughter's diaper in the bedroom by himself and was also playing with her (see Fig. 21.1).



TIME BEGAN	TIME ENDED	WHAT DID YOU DO?	WHERE?	LIST OTHER PERSONS WITH YOU	DOING ANYTHING ELSE?
12 AM	6:30	Sleeping	Bedroom	Spouse	Played with child
6:30	7:00	Diaper changed	Bedroom	No	
7:00	7:20	Took a shower, got ready for work	Bathroom	No	

**Fig. 21.1** An example of a time diary entry

The fathers’ reports of their weekday and weekend day activities were computed by the number of minutes that fathers spent with their children. Based on the Lamb model (Lamb et al. 1987), each segment of time was categorized into three dimensions of father involvement: (1) engagement (direct contact with the child); (2) accessibility (within earshot distance of the child); and (3) sole responsibility (child was left with the father, no other adults in the house). To examine the everyday detailed activities, engagement was divided into two subdimensions: play and care. These were then further divided into four activities: feeding, bathing, waking, or putting the child to sleep, and changing diapers. Play was also divided into two activities: active and direct interaction, and indirect play such as watching TV together. For the dimension of accessibility, household chores were created which included duties such as vacuuming, cooking the family meals, and laundry. The third dimension, responsibility (the child was left alone with the father who was the only adult in the home), was not included since this dimension was rarely evident among this sample. If fathers listed that they did two activities (e.g., feeding and playing with the toddler for 20 minutes), then the amount of time was divided into the number of activities, 10 minutes playing with and 10 minutes feeding the toddler.

To obtain fathers’ averaged level of involvement per day, each subscale was weighted by the number of days in a week. Thus, activities during the workday was multiplied by 5 and activities during the nonworkday (a weekend day) was multiplied by 2, and then divided by 7 to create

an average time per day. For example, if a father played with their child for 20 minutes during a workday and 30 minutes on the weekend, his mean level of play per day would be 22.9 minutes per day  $[(20 \text{ min} \times 5 + 30 \text{ min} \times 2)/7]$ .

## Results

First, to examine whether fathers’ levels of education and income (both household and individual) were associated with their levels of involvement, a series of correlational analyses were conducted separately by country. The broader levels of father involvement (accessibility, chores, play, and care) were used in the analyses. For immigrant Chinese-Canadian fathers (IM), analyses revealed that only household income was negatively associated with fathers’ levels of care ( $r=-0.29, p<0.05$ ). For Chinese fathers (CH), household income, and more specifically, fathers’ levels of income, was negatively associated with the amounts of time they spent engaged in household chores ( $r$ ’s= $-0.28, -0.36, p$ ’s $<0.05, 0.01$ , respectively). Thus, for further analyses, levels of household and fathers’ incomes were co-varied.

As seen in Table 21.2, Chinese fathers from Canada and China were involved in various dimensions of father involvement, except for responsibility. Generally, IM and CH fathers’ levels of engagement were fairly high, 2 hours and 48 minutes, and 2 hours and 56 minutes, respectively. Both groups of fathers also spend a significant amount of time being accessible to their children and families (4 hours and 34 minutes for IM fathers, 3 hours and 31 minutes for CH fathers).

To analyze our data, we first investigated the general levels of father involvement between the two samples and to examine whether gender differences are evident. Thus, we conducted a series of 2 (child's gender)  $\times$  2 (country: Canada, China) ANCOVAs on the broad dimensions (care, play, accessibility), controlling for household and fathers' levels of income. To examine whether fathers were more likely to engage in particular types of care activities (i.e., bathing, diapering, feeding, sleeping activities) or play activities (i.e., active, passive), we conducted two 2 (child's gender)  $\times$  2 (country: Canada, China) repeated-measures ANCOVAs, with the activities treated as the repeated measures for play and care, and controlling for fathers' and household income levels. Post hoc ANOVAs for the between subjects and post hoc *t*-tests for the within subjects were used to further explore the significant main and interaction effects of child's gender and country.

## Accessibility

On average, fathers were generally available for their toddlers, with IM fathers being accessible for an average of 4 hours and 34 minutes a day as compared to CH fathers' 3 hours and 31 minutes a day. To examine whether IM and CH fathers' levels of accessibility differed and whether gender of the child played a factor, an ANOVA was conducted. A significant country effect was found,  $F(1, 114) = 6.37, p < 0.05$ , revealing that IM fathers were significantly more accessible to their families than were CH fathers. The gender of the child did not impact fathers' level of availability. However, when controlling for household and fathers' levels of income, this difference between IM and CH fathers was no longer significant. The analysis revealed that not surprisingly, IM and CH fathers did not significantly differ in their levels of accessibility to their toddlers, when taking levels of income into consideration.

## Household Chores

As seen in Table 21.1, IM fathers spent an average of 1 hour and 57 minutes doing household

chores and CH fathers spent 57 minutes. The ANOVA revealed a significant country effect,  $F(1, 114) = 31.71, p < 0.001$ , with IM fathers doing almost twice as much household duties than their CH counterparts. However, even when taking levels of income into consideration, this country difference remained significant,  $F(1, 114) = 10.75, p < 0.001$ .

## Engagement

The average amounts of time that IM and CH fathers spent in direct interaction with their children (including playing with and caring for) was 2 hour and 48 minutes, and 1 hour and 56 minutes, respectively. Initially, the ANOVA revealed a main effect for country,  $F(1, 114) = 8.79, p < 0.01$ . However, controlling for income, differences in levels of engagement by country were no longer significant.

## Care

For levels of care, IM fathers spent an average of 1 hour and 10 minutes a day directly taking care of their toddlers (such as feeding, bathing), whereas CH fathers spent about 30 minutes a day (see Table 21.1). The ANCOVA analysis on

**Table 21.1** Absolute mean levels of father involvement (hours: minutes) between Chinese-Canadian and Mainland Chinese fathers of young children

Father involvement	Involved fathers only/Country		Overall time/country	
	Canada	China	Canada	China
Engagement	3:21	2:29	2:48	1:56
Care	1:30	0:50	1:10	0:30
Food	0:31	0:12	0:24	0:07
Bathing	0:11	0:10	0:08	0:06
Sleep	0:12	0:08	0:10	0:05
Diaper	0:10	0:02	0:07	0:01
Play	1:51	1:39	1:38	1:26
Active	1:30	1:25	1:20	1:14
Passive	0:21	0:13	0:19	0:12
Accessibility	4:34	3:31	4:34	3:31
Household chores	2:00	1:10	1:57	0:57
Total	7:55	6:00	7:22	5:27

fathers’ general levels of care revealed no main or interaction effects once household and fathers’ level of income was taken into consideration. Moreover, fathers were not generally more likely to take care of sons than daughters.

Further analyses on whether fathers were more engaged in one type of caregiving duty than the other (i.e., bathing, feeding, changing clothes, changing diapers) revealed no significant main or interaction effects. Thus, fathers engaged in various child care duties.

Play

As seen in Table 21.1, the fathers who played with their children, on average, spent significant amounts of time (1 hour and 38 minutes for IM fathers, 1 hour and 26 minutes for CH fathers). Overall, both the ANOVA and the ANCOVA revealed that IM fathers were generally spending similar amounts of time with their toddlers as compared to CH fathers. However and unexpectedly, a significant main effect for child’s gender was found, even when controlling for levels of income,  $F(1, 114)=5.15$ ,  $p<0.05$  where fathers unexpectedly spent greater amounts of time playing with their daughters than did fathers of sons ( $M$ ’s=1 hour and 47 minutes, 1 hour and 9 minutes, respectively).

Focusing on the types of play (active, passive), the analysis revealed only a main effect for type of play,  $F(1, 97)=10.76$ ,  $p<0.001$ . Post hoc ANOVAs revealed that fathers were more likely to physically play with their children than to engage in passive play such as watching a DVD (1 hour and 17 minutes, 16 minutes, respectively).

Noninvolved Fathers Within Various Dimensions

The mean levels of involvement, however, need to be closely analyzed since individual differences may not be apparent. Specifically, in this study, some fathers did not engage with their children in relation to play or care activities, as others may not have spent any time doing household chores. As seen in Table 21.2, a set of

**Table 21.2** Number and percentage of sample of uninvolved Chinese-Canadian and Mainland Chinese fathers of young children by dimensions of father involvement

Country	Father involvement/subsample and percentage of sample			
	Household chores	Play	Care	Overall <sup>a</sup>
Canada	2 (2.9)	8 (11.8)	15 (22.1)	0
China	9 (17.3)	7 (13.5)	20 (38.5)	2 (3.8)

<sup>a</sup>Refers to number of fathers who were not involved in household chores, playing with or caring for their toddlers

frequencies were employed to examine the extent to which fathers were not involved in the various dimensions of FI.

Lack of Engagement

First, we examined how many fathers did not play with or care for their children. Specifically, eight (11.8%) IM (four fathers of girls) and seven (13.5%) CH (two fathers of girls) fathers did not spend any time playing with their children during the past week. The percentage of these fathers did not significantly differ by country. A greater number of fathers, 15 (22.1%) IM (nine fathers of girls) and 20 (38.5%) CH (12 fathers of girls) fathers did not engage in any caregiving duties during the workday and non-workday. A two-sample  $t$ -test between percents comparison revealed that CH fathers were significantly more likely than IM fathers to remain uninvolved in their toddler’s child care activities, reflecting a more traditional role. Assessing overall levels of engagement, the descriptives revealed that eight fathers (four IM fathers, four CH fathers) did not report playing with or caring for their toddlers.

Household Chores

Although all fathers were at some level accessible to their toddlers and families, a small portion did not spend any time doing household chores. Specifically, two IM (two fathers of girls) and nine (four fathers of girls) CH fathers had no household responsibilities that particular week.

The percentage of fathers in each group did not significantly differ by country (see Table 21.2).

Examining the three subdimensions, play, care, and household chores, only two fathers from China (fathers of girls) were not involved in these types of activities. This small fraction of fathers provides some insight into how individual fathers may vary in their types of social interactions with their toddlers and families. Such a detailed approach to examining fathers allows us to better understand the complexities of fathering and their overt behaviors at the individual level.

## Discussion

Our present study extends our current knowledge on Chinese fathers in differing sociocultural contexts, Canada and China. With the use of the Time Diary approach, fathers' reports on their levels of involvement with their children provided greater clarity into the everyday, mundane activities of family life. It is through these everyday activities that we were then able to better capture cultural nuances and family variations. Specifically, since our knowledge on Chinese fathering is scant and inconsistent, it was important to use a comparative sample to examine the fathering behaviors of contemporary fathers and whether immigration potentially influences levels of involvement.

The use of the Time Diary approach revealed that fathers varied in their levels of involvement in their children's lives. Specifically, the degree to which fathers reported their everyday activities greatly varied among fathers. As seen in Table 21.2, although small, a portion of fathers did not spend time caring for and/or playing with their children and/or engaged in household chores. This lack of involvement may be reflective of a continued influence of Chinese traditions and a stronger demarcation of gender roles within their families. Further research on fathers of older children is needed to explore whether fathers' lack of involvement in certain dimensions may change over time. Perhaps some mothers are more protective of caregiving duties at the earlier stages of the child life. As some have reported,

mothers are the "maternal gatekeepers" thus, determining how and when fathers get involved in their children's lives (Lamb 2002).

The majority of fathers, however, have demonstrated a more egalitarian relationship with mothers. As seen in their reports, many of the Chinese-Canadian and Chinese (from mainland China) fathers revealed that they spent time engaging in play, care, and being accessible to their toddlers, as shown in Table 21.1.

## Accessibility

Not surprising, both Chinese-Canadian and native Chinese fathers were accessible to their children for a significant portion of the day. Contrary to past findings (e.g., see Yeung et al. 2001), Chinese fathers, especially immigrants, reported high levels of household chore responsibilities. Although for obvious reasons great caution is needed when comparing these absolute levels of involvement with past studies, Yeung et al.'s (2001) results from a national study (the 1997 Child Development Supplement to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Hofferth et al. 1998) were that fathers of children less than two years of age spent an average of nine minutes doing household chores.

## Engagement

For levels of engagement, the present findings clearly indicated that regardless of country or gender of the child, many of the Chinese fathers are not "aloof and distant" as some have reported (Fei 1935; Ho 1987; Shek 1998; Wilson 1974; Wolf 1970). Rather, many of the Chinese-Canadian and native Chinese fathers are actively engaging in child care duties such as feeding the toddler, changing diapers, and putting the toddler to sleep, among other caregiving duties. These findings are consistent with recent work on Chinese families (e.g., Kanatsu and Chao 2008; Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2008) as well as other ethnic minority groups (e.g., see Lamb et al. 2004; Tamis-LeMonda 2004; Yeung et al. 2001). For example, Tamis-LeMonda and her colleagues'

study (2008) on prenatal involvement found that most of the Chinese fathers accompanied their wives to the doctor's office, bought things for the baby, etc. These prenatal levels of involvement were found to be predictive of fathers' accessibility and engagement when the infant is one month old and their participation in their infants' learning activities at 14 months.

As many have contended (see Lamb 2002; Tamis-LeMonda 2004), play is an especially salient aspect of fathers' relationships with their children. Lamb (1981) first suggested that infants form their attachments to their fathers via play interactions whereas attachments to their mothers are based on sensitive care. Other researchers (e.g., Kotelchuck 1976; Yeung et al. 2001) examined the amounts of time spent playing with children in relation to other daily activities such as cleaning and feeding them, and found that play was an especially pronounced activity between fathers and their children. Although fathers in the present study spent significant amounts of time actively playing with their children, especially daughters (an average of an hour and a half), their levels of care were similar (see Table 21.1). Past researchers have found that when fathers were involved in their children's lives, fathers spent significantly more time playing with their children than doing child care activities or other household activities. Thus, the portrayal of fathers beyond economic provider was that of a *playmate* to their children (see Lamb 2002). This unequal balance of time toward playing was not evident among these Chinese fathers. Rather, and unexpectedly, their roles as caregivers were of equal importance to their roles as playmates, perhaps reflecting a more egalitarian relationship with their wives. Such increased levels of engagement by fathers support the current contentions that Chinese fathers, although at varying degrees, are becoming more child-centered, and are moving away from the Chinese traditional parenting roles.

## Responsibility

Past researchers have examined levels of responsibility, operationalized as fathers being responsible

for their children as the mothers leave the house. Unexpectedly, this dimension of father involvement was rarely evident in Chinese families in China and Canada. Thus, how father involvement is conceptualized and operationalized needs to be better understood within a more sociocultural context.

Another aspect of Chinese traditions of parenting roles is the preferential treatment toward sons compared to daughters. Our current study does not support a disproportional level of attention between fathers and their sons. Instead, there was some evidence among Chinese fathers for higher levels of play with daughters. Thus, with the social and political changes and the importance of gender equality that has been supported in China's governmental policies, there is some evidence that the traditional father-child relationship has been altered to a more generalized child-centered approach.

Overall, as illustrated here, fathers' conceptual framework of fatherhood has shifted from traditional notions of Chinese fathering, blending roles that were traditionally viewed as "women's work." This comparative study allowed us to recognize that these perceptions on fathering roles are an indication of a general cultural shift in societal mind-sets of Asians, rather than an influence from a more "westernized" culture. Supporting this contention is also the evidence that except for household activities, Chinese fathers from Canada and China were similar in their various fathering activities. Further exploration of frameworks on fatherhood in different ethnic and socioeconomic groups would be a meaningful way of advancing the scholarship on fathering.

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## Limitations of the Study

Some limitations of the study, however, need to be taken into consideration. First, due to the exploratory nature of the present study, the small sample of fathers was of middle-class standing from two major metropolitan cities in Canada and China. Thus, these findings may not be generalizable to other socioeconomic or other Asian



groups. Second, fathers recalled two recent days, one workday and one nonworkday. However, one or both of these days may have been “unusual” and not representative of their everyday activities. Perhaps fathers should be asked whether the days that they are reporting are “typical”; if unusual, perhaps another day should be used. Regardless, the level of minute details of everyday activities provides us with a more in-depth account of fathering behaviors and family functioning. This allows us to gain a greater understanding of how fathers view their lives as a father.

### Future Directions: Transforming Views and Assumptions About Culture

Over the past few decades, researchers, social policymakers, and educators have come to understand the importance that fathers play in their children’s lives. Especially as fathers’ roles become more multidimensional (i.e., economic provider, nurturer), such changes have led to heightened interest in fathering, with research on ethnic and immigrant fathers gaining a considerable amount of momentum.

With the multitude of variations of families’ sociocultural, socioeconomic status, immigrant backgrounds, researchers will need to continually refine theoretical and methodological frameworks that will capture the nuances and complexities of families. We concur with others who have stressed the importance of addressing sociocultural processes and the use of culturally sensitive and relevant methodological strategies. In addition, it is crucial to interpret findings within a cultural context (Quintana et al. 2006). Subsequently, future research on immigrant families should use more innovative methodologies such as the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative methods and a multi-informant approach, to tap into the dynamics and ever-changing social relationships among family members. These strategies will assist researchers to better theorize fathering in a richer and more comprehensive fashion, nesting our understanding within family and cultural processes.

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Wong Siu-sing

Quite recently Professor Chan Kwok-bun told me of an incident that he witnessed.

One evening, a family of five entered a restaurant and sat opposite Professor Chan's table. The father was a middle-aged man dressed in a suit. He sat facing the professor while his wife sat next to him and his children sat facing them. During the time that Professor Chan had his meal there, he never actually saw the father initiate conversation with the children or his wife, who was sitting right next to him. Occasionally the wife and the children asked him what he thought of the food, but he only replied briefly. For two whole hours, the father just wore a poker face and silently ate the food on the table.

Upon hearing that, I could not help thinking: In his work, this father may deliver eloquent speeches and even negotiate with strangers. How come he was so poker-faced and quiet when having dinner with his family in a supposedly relaxed environment?

The traditional Chinese family favours patriarchy. Under patriarchy, the man, especially the father, is the centre of the family, possessing the utmost authority. All important matters in the family are decided by him. The father possesses and controls all the resources and property of the family. And, by going out to work and earning money, he increases his social resources and

assets, in order to consolidate his power. In Chinese tradition the father is authoritative and strong, possessing the greatest power and the largest amount of property. Is that why the father in the restaurant was so withdrawn and serious?

For the fathering role, I have sympathy.

Ever since childhood, I have revered my father. The deepest impression he has made on me is of a very conscientious man. He wakes up a little after five every morning without exception, even when typhoon signal number ten is hoisted, even when the temperature is only 5 or 6 °C, even when he has worked overnight without rest, even when he has to work under a burning sun at a temperature of 37 or 38 °C at the outer wall of a 40- or 50-floor building or in a closed basement. He has never given up or loafed on the job. He always works 12 hours a day.

In my childhood, when I saw his back sunburnt and blackened from his outdoor work, I would ask myself, "Why does father have to work so hard? Is this what he has to do for his family of five? This is paternal love.... Father, thank you for all the trouble you have taken for our sakes...". I still remember when I was no longer a baby, he once revealed his feelings to me: "My child, it is hard to be a father, as I have to take care of the entire family as well as my own parents and brothers in my home village. Of course, it is no easy job for one person to shoulder so many responsibilities. However, when I work hard and see all your needs satisfied, I feel very happy".

Seeing the wrinkles spreading over my father's face and his hair turning grey, I very much wish

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he could rest. Meanwhile, the physical aches and pains brought about by his work get steadily worse with age. He has sacrificed his youth for the sake of my future. In my heart I am really grateful for this selfless and quiet love. He is admirable and lovable!

Without father, I would not be the person I am today.

Precisely because of my deep love for my father, I yearn to understand how fathers feel about their role, how they see it, and how they define themselves at home.

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## Research Motive, Objectives, and Methods

### Research Motive

There have been quite a few academic studies of the mother's role, but very few of the father's role. This is the reason, apart from my personal feelings for my father, why I choose to study the father's role. Many surveys and studies focus on motherhood, the mother's role, how to be a good mother, etc. As R.D. Laing (1971, p. 6) says, the family is like a flower. The mother is the pistil and we (children) are petals. When we are broken, the mother will hurt as if she has lost her arm.... It seems that the father has never been as esteemed as the mother is in the family. Roy Jarrett, Kelvin and Burton (2002, p. 211) point out that family studies have long focused on the mother, that the scope of studies covers not only fertility but also the process of social construction of the mother.

Sociologists have seldom studied the father's role and the way he interprets his role at home. Ruddick (1992, p. 176) says that we lack a history of fatherhood, that she is furious about that. Parke (1981, p. 127) also points out that almost no reference books about fatherhood have ever appeared. Even though sociologists have tried to define the father's role, they have not yet come to a unanimous conclusion. As Lorri A. Roggman et al. (2002, p. 2) say, there are too many limitations on any in-depth research into the father's role. The limitations include the fact that we lack consensus about it.

In addition, studies of the father's interpretation of his role at home are also much wanted. It is noteworthy that sociological studies have not answered in detail questions such as the following: How do fathers understand their role at home? How do they interpret it for themselves?

Comprehensively speaking, the lack of studies of the father's role, of the way he performs it and how he interprets the roles of others at home, may be due to the patriarchal nature of our society. In a patriarchal society, men occupy privileged positions in cultural, educational, academic, and other respects. Most scholars are men, and most studies of male roles (such as the father's) are dominated by male scholars. As a result, people naturally think that men are quite clear about their own roles and seldom query studies on male roles. Moreover, in a society dominated by men, it is far more interesting and refreshing to study human beings other than men (i.e., women) than to study the roles of men. In addition, with the rise of the feminist movement, information enhancing women's status has been widely disseminated. The academic world has also focused on the studies of women and the mother's role, neglecting the studies of men's roles and how they interpret and perform their roles.

### Research Objectives

Because there are so few studies of the father's role, the father cannot fully comprehend the complexity of his own role. By contrast, the mother can easily find reference books about her role at home, and may also refer back to the memory of her own mother to learn about his father, who was usually out at work when he was a boy. He can also try to figure his way forward through his own observation and what he has learnt, of course, from his friends, relatives, and teachers. Yet, the father's role remains not as clearly defined as the mother's. No wonder scholars have pointed out that the father's is an ambiguous role in the family. For example, Ross D. Parke (1987, p. 12) says that fathers are not at all clear about what is expected of them in the first place.



Not only does the father's role at home in the city lack a uniform description, but there are hardly any good sociological studies of how the father interprets and exercises his role at home within the Chinese rural patriarchal family structure. This has thus stimulated my determination to carry out a study of the father within the Chinese rural patriarchal family structure and the way he performs his role.

My aim is therefore to provide such research and to focus on the father in rural Chinese society. In my study, I will seek to establish how the fathers see their role, and how their views affect their action in the home. To that end, I invited the fathers to narrate all the things they do at home every day.

From this research I hope to draw conclusions which may be seen against traditional attitudes. In short, this study seeks to arrive at a new understanding of the diversity and variability of the father's role.

## Methodology

I adopted qualitative research methods and carried out field observation and in-depth interviews, in order to study fathers in Fener Village, Hongcao Town, Shangwei City, Guangdong Province. I carried out field observation of six families there and interviewed in depth 15 fathers, 12 mothers, and 12 children from a group of 15 families.

In order to better design the contents of the interviews, field observation enabled me to arrive at a basic understanding of the context in which the father fulfils his role at home. For instance, from my observations, I found that the fathers express themselves in different ways, some in old, conventional ways (working hard outside, providing for the wife and the children), some taking on responsibilities traditionally ascribed to the mother. I could then predict their different interpretations and prepare the interview questions accordingly. Moreover, by observing the daily contact between the fathers and their wives and children (such as whether they eat together and how they interact at meal-times), it is possible to assess the extent to which they support the father's interpretation of his

role at home. It thereby becomes possible to understand their significance for the father's role and its different interpretations. In addition, observation of the father's behaviour at home highlighted similarities in the ways the different fathers interpret their role in the home, for instance, the fact that they usually use the imperative form when talking to their children.

Interviewing the fathers allowed them to personally narrate the changes, pains, and joys experienced in the entire process of growth from childhood to fatherhood. This is first-person experience and interpretation. The ground for doing in-depth interviews with the mothers and children is that the father's is not an isolated role at home. A man cannot have children unless he finds a wife, and he cannot play the role of a father unless he has children. The father is closely linked to the environment (i.e., the family) that provides him with his role. It is therefore important to interview the mothers and the children in order to analyse the father's role at home as experienced by other members of the family.

Fener is a typical rural village, whose inhabitants are mainly engaged in farming, fishing, crab and shrimp culture. The village family structure is patriarchal; the father enjoys great power at home and is respected by the villagers. This is also my home village, where many of my relatives still live. My extensive social network there provides me with many interviewees.

Ever since my childhood, my father has taught me Chiu Chow dialect, so my communication with the villagers was perfectly all right. Fener Village is an ideal research site.

Since the everyday language of all the research subjects is Chiu Chow, I also used it during the in-depth interviews.

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## The Literature

To understand the father's role, we may survey the relevant research literature and academic studies on the subject. It is noteworthy that sociologists have not paid much attention to two questions: How do the fathers understand their own role at home? How do they interpret themselves?

## **Socially Defined Role: Male = Instrumental Role**

The sociologists, Talcott Parsons and Bales (1955), think that in the family, every person has a different role and a different set of duties. It is through these roles and duties that the family socializes its members and satisfies their needs. More importantly, Talcott Parsons thinks that society imposes different social roles on different people. Take the family as an example. In accordance with society's definition of men, the father is expected to fulfil an instrumental role at home—that is to say he is the breadwinner of the family. And in keeping with society's definition of women, the mother is expected to perform an expressive role at home—that is to say she is responsible for rearing and caring.

Parsons thinks that society has the power to define roles. But social roles are not defined according to individual likes and dislikes, but learnt from the process of socialization (especially from family socialization). In other words, it is from the family that girls learn the mother's role and boys learn the father's role. However, in understanding and interpreting their respective roles, the father needs to rely on society more than the mother. This arrangement is connected with the father's unique identity in terms of biological necessity and "social accident".

## **Father Is Biological Need and Social Accident**

The anthropologist, Margaret Mead, says, "Although the father's appearance is a biological need, his appearance is an accident in society" (see Parke and Brott 1999, p. 17). What Margaret Mead means is that before a male can become a father, he has to provide and deliver sperm to the female ovary in order to fertilize an egg which will lead to the woman giving birth. Thus, the man is a "necessary" participant in the biological process. Psychologists such as Ross D. Parke (1999) also point out that although the man is a "necessary" participant in the biological process, he has an innate defect: unlike women, he has

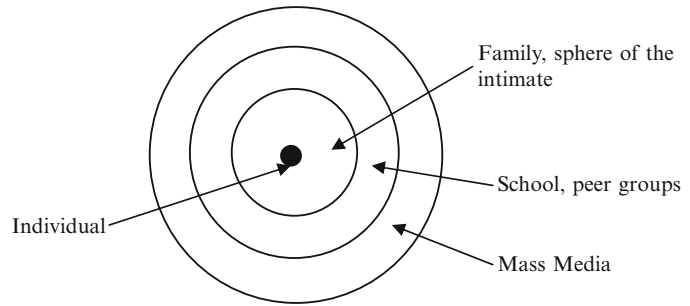
physiological limitations which mean that he is unable to experience reproduction and breast-feeding (Seel 1987).

Mead says that the appearance of the father is a kind of "social accident". What she means is that by way of socialization from childhood to adulthood, the girl is moulded into a rearing and caring role, whereas the boy is moulded into a role which likes fun, freedom, contest, and competition, a role which is emotionally less expressive and caring. In other words, women have learnt since childhood how to take care of others. To them, the change from girlhood to motherhood is just a nominal one. In effect, it is merely a continuation of the role they have acquired. To a father, however, the role of rearing and caring for children is unfamiliar. The change from boyhood to fatherhood, when one has to take care of children, is an abrupt one. Thus, to a boy, to have to learn to play the role of caring for children as a father is an accident as well as an exception. The girl can directly learn how to be a mother from her own mother, who usually stays at home, but the boy cannot learn how to be a father from the father, who is often at work outside. The son cannot learn to be a father from an "absent father", an "invisible father". The boy has to infer the father's role by indirect ways.

## **Understanding the Father's Role and Seeking Its Interpretation Through Society**

The sociologist, Peter L. Berger (1986, p. 17, 121), says, "Society provides values, logic and various kinds of data to people. These things endowed by society constitute our 'knowledge' .... In other words, people's feelings, behaviour and self understanding are predefined by society". "Society not only controls our behaviour but also shapes our self identity, thoughts and feelings".

Berger compares society to a map and thinks that from birth onwards we have been placed in a certain location on the social map (for example, gender role). This social location tells us "what we should and should not do" and "other people's

**Diagram 22.1**

expectations of someone in this location". He thinks that society is an objective fact external to our body and surrounding us. The social system defines our social location, guides our behaviour, and shapes our expectations of our own location. In other words, society determines what we should do as well as tells us what we actually are.

Berger thinks that being in society is like being at the centre of a set of concentric circles, each circle representing a different institution (e.g., different public bodies, such as family, school, and the mass media). In different ways (such as ridicule, rejection, and contempt), these bodies control us and guide us into ways preset by society, impelling us to learn to survive in an environment preset by society (see Diagram 22.1).

Moreover, he thinks that in both public life (such as school life) and private life (such as family life), our actions and thoughts are constrained by these public institutions. Take the father as an example. "How to be a father?" "What is a father supposed to do?" The small boy has unconsciously found answers to such questions from the family, school, and television. In fact, the practices of the agents of these public institutions, such as the behaviour and guidance of father, mother, and teachers, have already provided the interpretation blueprint of the father's role.

Among the many social systems in control of our thoughts and behaviour, familial control is most powerful, because to an individual, the family is "the sphere of the intimate", and this sphere is a crucial element upon which we rely to support our self-image. As Berger says, the family is a site nurturing and shaping an individual's thoughts and actions.

The psychoanalyst, R. D. Laing (1971), also points out that the family exerts a strong influence on our behaviour and thoughts. He argues that the family has a set of operational rules which impel the family to operate properly and give play to its function of socialization, producing enormous impact on our behaviour and thoughts and guiding us to learn how to survive in the family or some other social system outside the family. Taking his "happy family game" as an example, Laing points out that one of the operational rules of the family is collusion. When an individual claims that he lives in a happy family, it may not be the truth. They may not really live in a happy and joyous family. Their claim may be a result of collusion with the family. Precisely because family members often (in fact they must) tell each other that they live in a happy family, they are thereby formatively influenced to believe that their family is a happy one. This example of collusion clearly illustrates the enormous impact produced by the family on our thoughts and behaviour.

Berger (1986, p. 93) says, "About control exerted by social forces, why do we not feel the least bit of pain... It is because oftentimes, when society expresses its expectations of us, we also like the demands made by society. Deep down in our hearts, we crave to follow social norms and yearn for the location allocated to us by society".

Interestingly, Berger points out it is not just that we live in society, but that society is also deeply planted in our minds by way of socialization. In other words, society existed before we were born and had already defined basic symbols, roles, identities, and values. So when we were born, we lived in an environment already defined

by society, unconsciously following conventional roles and norms of society, which finally constitute our inner consciousness. Meanwhile, we also long to fulfil the norms of our roles as set by society. In our daily life, we unconsciously rebuild and confirm roles and identities imposed by society on us. This concept is summed up by Hegel: "The world is constituted by the given and the constructed" (quoted by Laing 1971, p. 79).

Take the father's role, for example. This role has long been defined and shaped by society as "one who provides for the entire family". Some fathers have already internalized this family role imposed on the father by society. They take the ability to provide for the family as the sole criterion for self-assessment. On the other hand, the father is also glad to interpret his role at home based on the image of an economic provider.

As I have said, although public institutions and their agents, though socialization, have already provided the boy with a blueprint of the father's role, the boy is still socially unfit to become a father, whereas the girl is well prepared for motherhood. Most studies tell us that socialization invisibly hinders the shaping of the boy into the father, but when the girl is still at a tender age, her parents and those close to her prefer to present her with dolls and turn her into a temporary babysitter, learning the skills she will need by feeding and cuddling dolls and dressing them, etc. On the other hand, parent's friends and relatives prefer to present the boy with toy cars, guns, basketballs, and footballs. During her childhood the girl has the opportunity to learn the skills of nurturing and caring (Seel 1987). The more so, because the mother stays at home more than the father to take care of children, the girl can recall from memory how her mother interpreted her role at home (Phillips 1995). In contrast, most fathers have to go out to work and do not spend much time at home so that they have less communication with their children than their wife does. Once a boy becomes a father, apart from learning the role of going out to work, he could not have learnt anything else from his father. So, as a parent, it is easier for women than for men to find ways to interpret their role, and the father's role at home remains ambiguous.

## The Ambiguous Father

When we review the relevant social science literature, we will notice that the ambiguous role of the father at home is traceable. For example, a 1970 US Ivy League college survey finds that most male students think that their father is an indifferent person, who is not devoted to family life and who seldom gives love (Osherson 1986). More recent studies tend to place the image of the father on a par with the stepfather, adoptive father, uncle, grandfather, brother, and friend (Eggebeen 2002). Moreover, scholars even call the father the invisible being in the family. For instance, the psychologist, Chung See-ka (Ao 1996) discovers that children regard their fathers as a stranger. Even more sadly, social scientists fail to specifically analyse how the father interprets his own role at home, particularly fathers in rural areas of China.

Some studies of the family no doubt mention the parents' roles and their interpretation at home, but the range is either too wide or too narrow. Too narrow means that certain scholars' definition of the parents' roles and their interpretation at home are too diversified and idealized. For instance, scholars point out that modern parents have to play roles such as children's nurturer, children's playmate, children's teacher, children's therapist, children's economic provider, and so on (Ao 1996).

Too narrow means that some scholars tend to define the father's role at home and his interpretation of the role as one-dimensional. For example, the sociologists, Talcott Parsons and Bales (1955), define the father as leader of, and economic provider for, the family. Rob Palkovitz (2002, p. 40) says, "Economic provider is still at the centre of the contemporary father's role". Michael E. Lamb (1986, p. 5) says, "The father's role is mainly defined as the person who provides for the family".

## Limitations of the Patriarchal Family

As we have seen, the father's role is inadequately defined by society. Moreover, the structure of traditional rural Chinese society is patriarchal, that

is to say that men are readily respected and esteemed (Marciano 1986). The father is the central figure of the family, enjoying the greatest power, but this structure has set up obstacles for men's understanding and performance of the father's role.

In traditional rural Chinese society, in order to solidify his power and status at home and to maintain the image of economic provider for the family, the father has to draw on a great deal of mental and physical energy. As the father monopolizes the material resources of the family and possesses the greatest power of decision, he keeps the other family members in subjection to him. On top of that, most of the time he works busily outside and seldom interacts with other members of the family. As a result, it is difficult for them to build up an intimate relationship with each other. Moreover, in the traditional rural Chinese family, the social contract has long rationalized parental roles at home, decreeing the money-management role for the father and the child-rearing role for the mother (Marciano 1986).

From that it can be seen that the patriarchal family structure practically confines the father to a one-dimensional role (economic provider), and the social contract also quietly removes the father's role from family life.

As a consequence of the confinement of the father's role by the patriarchal family and the social contract, the father can only play a passive role. Some scholars studying family roles think that the father is incapable of making any changes to his role in the family and that he suffers a lot at home. For example, Samuel Osherson (1986) thinks that, whereas many fathers have to face pressure and employment relations issues at work, they also have to cope with the demands of wife and children at home. To balance the public sphere (work) with the private sphere (family) is itself a difficult task. On top of that, in the circumstances of the patriarchal family and the social contract, the father is forced by society to absent himself from family life. As a consequence, the father is in a painful situation. Furthermore, Osherson (1986) thinks that the father is in a position of weakness in the family, the reason being that, compared with the mother,

the father lacks time to stay at home and construct and meditate upon his own role and his relationship with his children.

Undeniably, in traditional rural Chinese families, the patriarchal family structure and social contract limit the father's role. Having to balance the demands of work and family causes some fathers considerable distress. However, when society understands the father's role to be that of an economic provider, do fathers really accept this one-dimensional status? Are they really so passive, helpless, and unable to change their performance according to their own volition?

### He Is Active

The sociologist, George H. Mead (1986), does not think that human beings are passive and just blindly compliant with values and norms set by society. He believes that people will interpret their environment for themselves and act accordingly. He thinks every person is a product of social interaction and not predefined (Blumer 1995).

George H. Mead divides the self into two parts—"me" and "I". "Me" refers to that part of the self shaped by socialization. In other words, part of people's thoughts and behaviour is formed through social interaction. He thinks that in their interaction with parents, teachers, relatives, and friends from childhood to adulthood, people have had instilled into themselves a series of attitudes and behaviours set by society. As time passes, people will internalize, rationalize, and normalize these values. "I" refers to part of the self, which is shaped by unique personal will and imagination. George H. Mead believes that another part of people's thoughts and actions is constituted by personal will and creativity. He thinks that when interacting with other people, people will give play to their creativity according to their own preferences, needs, and imagination—new elements will be added in self-construction. In other words, Mead believes that in their interaction with others, people are active, creative, and innovative.

The sociologist, Dennis H. Wrong (1976), also thinks that in the process of socialization,



people are active. To established institutions, people do not just say yes. Through interaction, we may make newborns internalize social norms and values and follow systems established by society so that they will not become deviant. Nonetheless, he does not agree that human beings are creatures which internalize *all* social norms and values; nor does he think that people will not query everything established by society. In other words, socialization cannot produce a group of people who completely accept all the givens of society (such as institutions, norms, and values). On the contrary, people can give play to their creativity in this process.

By the same token, although the patriarchal family and the social family limit the father's role, fathers in conventional rural Chinese families are not passive. On the contrary, through daily interaction, they are able to change the status quo. They are able to give play to their imagination and creativity, interpret their role at home, find and create a set of methods to perform their own role in the family. Moreover, the attitude and assessment of other family members in respect of the father's performance of his role will become a mirror for him. Thus it influences his understanding of his own role at home, his choice of how to perform that role, and his assessment of his performance.

## A Diversified He/She

The sociologist, Herbert Blumer (1995, p. 208) says, "People's behaviour is not the result of compliance with the established values, ideas, attitudes... of society, but... of their interpretation of themselves". Blumer (1995, p. 208) thinks that society is just a framework of people's behaviour; it cannot determine people's behaviour. By that he means that culture, social institutions, norms, and values as defined by society are just a series of signs to help people understand their environment. In reality, whether people will accept established social systems and follow established behaviour and norms depends on whether people interpret these signs actively or passively.

Peter L. Berger (1986) thinks that at people's birth, society has already preset different behavioural norms for different roles and genders which enable people to easily grasp and understand the world. He also believes, however, that people have the intention and ability to modify social institutions and established behavioural norms. Like Blumer, he thinks that society is a stage. To some extent, people's behaviour is influenced by society's definition of different roles. People's behaviour is also influenced, however, by their own interpretation of their role. People will decide for themselves how and when to play a role properly or not and perform a play well or not.

According to Berger (1986), when people interpret their role as defined for them by society, there may be three possibilities. In other words, people may deal with their role through one of the following: transformation, detachment, and manipulation.

Transformation means not accepting the performance of a certain role as defined by society, completely changing the performance of the role and even acting counter to the role in daily life. For example, a master expects his servant to bow to him, but the servant slaps him (Berger 1986, p. 129). Another example: society accepts women putting on make-up before going out but does not accept men doing the same. A certain man, however, ignores the expectations of society and puts on make-up every time he goes out. These are all examples of transformation.

Detachment means not accepting the behaviour of a certain role preset by society, and detaching oneself from society when playing it in daily life. To put it simply, detachment means establishing one's own world, separating oneself from society by way of one's small world and withdrawing from the original social structure. For example, some homosexuals speak a language constructed by themselves, and construct their own circle by means of special slang, keeping themselves aloof from the society of the majority. Another example: the educational system of society has decreed nine years' compulsory education for children and deems that children have the responsibility to study properly. A certain child,

however, does not agree with this idea. He is inattentive in class. He is keen on hip hop, adopting with his friends certain styles of dress (such as loose parka), hobbies (such as street dance), and behaviour (such as writing graffiti). He thus detaches his own hip-hop world from the one that is expected of him, that of the well-behaved pupil, and from the environment of school. These are all examples of detachment.

Manipulation means there is no intention to change social structure or to withdraw from the original social structure. On the surface, the person follows the role and behaviour prescribed by society. In his heart, however, he does not accept the behaviour prescribed by society. He conforms to society's conventions only when it suits him or in order to keep up the appearance of conformity. An example: in order to win his parents' praise and get advantages, a child may study hard even though deep down he hates learning and books. In addition, when he conforms, it is from an ulterior motive rather than sincerity; his mind is opposed to the role, as a result of which there will be role distance. For example, the role of colonized aborigines expects them to serve the whites, but meanwhile they are planning how to cut white people's throats (Berger 1986).

Berger (1986) also points out that apart from actively deviating from society's expectations of a role, as described earlier, alternation may occur between the various strategies. It means that, in the course of changing the way they handle a certain role, people may lack confidence in the choices they have made. As a result, their understanding and performance of their role may take different forms under different circumstances. Thus, there are infinite possibilities of self-understanding, in the same way that, when facing a series of mirrors, one face may wear many masks (Tong and Chan 2001). For example, when a father is doubtful about the way he interprets his role, he may express himself by working hard outside the home or by tidying up the home and taking care of the children, and at times by eating and sleeping without giving a thought to anything else. His home is his stage, where he is an actor with his own view. This is very Goffmanian. One face, many masks.

By the same token, in traditional rural Chinese families, apart from fathers who will follow the definition established by society and comply with the role and behaviour imposed by society on them, I believe there are fathers who have their own interpretation, especially concerning how to perform their role at home.

Moreover, I believe the three possibilities suggested by Berger may appear among fathers at home. In other words, some fathers will not fulfil the role as it is defined by society, i.e., by concentrating on work as the economic provider of the entire family. Instead, they have a new perception of their role, which they may express through transformation—not working at all; taking over tasks traditionally expected of the mother, e.g., tidying up the home and cooking. Or their understanding of the role may be expressed through detachment—indulging in drinking after work in order to avoid the father's role and responsibilities at home.

As Angela Philips says (1995, p. 13), “Many men will gradually *invent* different ways to play the father's role. To some people, these *inventions* are often positive and these methods of self-expression are far better than those they learnt from their own father when they were small”.

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## Data Analysis

### Field Observation

In order to make full preparation for the in-depth interviews, I arrived in Fener Village in Guangdong Province on 4 December, 2004, and carried out field observation of six families. I found two patterns of meal taking, the first being the father eating together with the children, the second being the father eating separately from the children.

Observation of the patterns of meal-taking made me think that the wife's role at home may help or hinder the father in performing his role. So, in the interviews I tried to discover the wife's expectations of her husband as a father and her view of his performance. I hoped thereby to discover the wife's influence on the husband's performance as

a father and to analyse from this point of view the father's difficulty in performing his role at home in his own way.

### **The Father's Performance at Home**

When observing their meal-taking, I noticed that different fathers have different styles of performance at home. Some fathers express themselves in old ways. They work day in and day out, playing the role of economic provider at home. For example, some fathers are only concerned with working for money outside and they take providing for their wife and children as their only responsibility. They ignore all domestic affairs and assign the duty of looking after and caring for the children to their wife.

Although most of the fathers in the village perform their role in such a way, yet there are fathers who arrive at their own definition of the role and perform it according to their own wish. Some work hard outside to earn money and try their best to satisfy their wife and children materially whilst simultaneously undertaking the task of caring for their children. Some fathers stay at home to look after their children and do housework such as cleaning and washing, while their wives go out to work and become the economic provider of the entire family.

#### **Example One**

This family was bustling with noise and excitement before the father came home from work. Younger children chased each other, running and jumping in the drawing room, while the older child focused on the television. No sooner had the father come in, then the younger children stopped running and sat one after the other on the brown wooden sofa. And the older child immediately switched off the TV, ran into the kitchen, and helped the mother to bring out bowls and chopsticks, wipe the dining table, and put out the dishes.

The father sat at the dining table and kept his gaze fixed upon the news without speaking to his children. Interestingly, when the family were taking their meal, even though the chairs next to the father were vacant, the children just sat on the sofa to eat. It was only after the mother's repeated

requests that the older daughter moved to the chair by her father and ate. During dinner, the mother fed the youngest child, urged the other children to eat more, and talked to her husband at the same time, while the father did not address the children at all.

#### **Example Two**

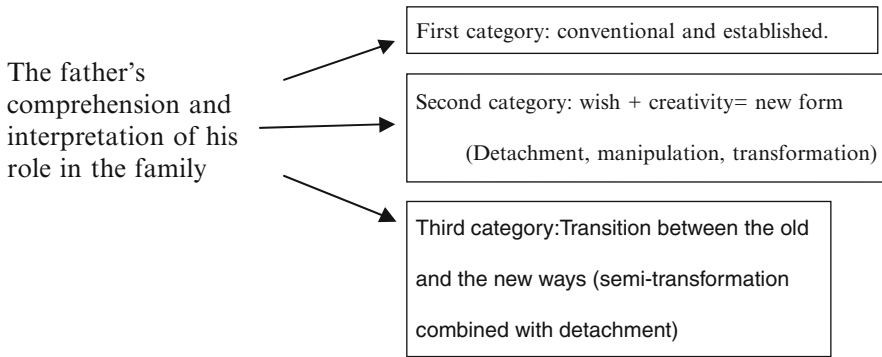
In this family, because the wife had to go out to work, the husband single-handedly looked after the children's daily life. When the father was out of the house, the three children quietly played poker in the drawing room. Unlike the family in example one, when the father returned home from the food market, the children ran up to him, hugged him, and eagerly told him about the poker game. Subsequently, the children took the food to the kitchen and washed it together with the father.

While doing the washing-up, the father would ask the children about school and they readily informed him. Their dialogue was pleasant, the faces of the father and the children wreathed in tender smiles. During their dinner, the children not only helped to bring out bowls, chopsticks, and dishes, but also gladly sat next to the father. And the father urged them to eat more. Their conversation was full of joy.

It can thus be seen that in reality, not every father expresses himself or performs the role of economic provider in the conventional way. Instead, the father is in a position to interpret his role for himself and to define it in accordance with his own needs, desires, and situation. Therefore, in the interviews, I would ask the fathers about their perception of their role at home and get them to compare their performance with that of the other fathers, in order to understand how they differ from each other in terms of performance, views, and interpretation. This helped me to further comprehend the variability of the performance of the father's role at home and the difficulty of arriving at a new interpretation.

### **In-depth Interviews**

Apart from field observation, which helped me to comprehend how the fathers play their role at home, I also explored this topic by way of



**Diagram 22.2**

in-depth interviews from 3 January 2005 to 7 January 2005.

Through the interviews, I found that fathers in rural Chinese areas interpret and perform their role at home in different ways. They can be largely divided into three categories. The first category consists of fathers who follow the conventional and established way. The second category consists of fathers who understand and interpret themselves in accordance with their own wishes and creativity. The third category consists of fathers who are transitional or between the new and the old ways (Diagram 22.2). As the third category lies between the first and the second, I will first analyse the first and the second before I come to the third.

### **The First Category of Fathers: Conventional and Established Way**

The first category of fathers consists of people who express the father's role in the traditional way. They also comprise the largest group of fathers interviewed, altogether seven people, amounting to about half of the total. I found that this group of fathers have a one-dimensional view of the father's role—economic provider of the family, that is the instrumental role referred to by Talcott Parsons.

The conventional and established way, i.e., the traditional one-dimensional form, means that the fathers tend to express their role at home in the old, traditional way. That is to say, they model themselves on, and accept, the way their own

fathers used to express themselves at home—through the instrumental role of the economic provider. Moreover, they have no doubts about this view of the role.

Interpreting the father's role at home to be one-dimensional is frankly revealed in their conversation with me:—"As a father, of course, I have to shoulder the economy of the family and provide for my wife and children. Could it be said that my wife should go out to work and provide for me?" "As a father, of course, I have to work hard outside and make more money.... Where did I learn this? From my own father. And other fathers are also like this...". "A father who is unable to satisfy the everyday needs of his children is a failure!" "As a father, one has to work hard. Otherwise, who will provide for the children's expenses? My father was also like this. What use is a father if he does not function as an economic provider?"

Among the interviewees, the 50-year-old Mr. Lin Yang is representative of this category. He told me that his father died of an illness when he was 13. The role of his father working day in, day out, has stayed firmly in his memory:—"I still remember in my childhood, father got up at three and went out to sea. He did not get home until midnight.... Although he did not talk much at home, his behaviour told me that the most important task of a father is to make money and provide for the children.... Let the woman take care of domestic affairs... Other fathers in the village are like that, too". From this it can be seen that the way other fathers in the village play their role has also reinforced Mr. Lin's view of the

father's role, convincing him firmly that fatherhood is inseparable from making money.

These fathers approve of the interpretation of the father's role as solely that of an economic provider. Mr. Lin Yang's words reflect this orientation: "A father is not a father at all if he just stays idly at home and does not go out to work .... When a man does not work and his wife has to, the family will not be a decent one!" Mr. Lin Yang disapproves of any roles other than that of the economic provider. He said, "What else can a father do if he does not work and make money? Is there any way a father could avoid working hard? The father's role is simply making money and paying for the schooling of the children. These are the father's responsibilities.... The daily life of the children can be taken care of by the wife".

On the other hand, I found that all their wives approved of, and colluded with, the husband playing the role of an economic provider, with the wife playing an expressive role in the family. And they did not agree that the husband may express himself in any other way at home. Mrs. Lin Yang said, "The arrangement by which the husband goes out to work in order to improve the family circumstances while the wife takes good care of the kids' daily life is a very good one. It is a perfect family model!"

However, I found that in families where the father expresses himself in an instrumental role, he is a rather remote figure for his children, and the children's impression of the father is also more obscure. For instance, Mr. Lin Yang's son said, "The impression left by my father on my mind is of a man who goes out to work. He is seldom at home, and we seldom talk. Our conversation consists of nothing other than work, academic results and pocket money. To me, father is a stranger. I don't know much about him".

Another finding is that in families where the father performs an instrumental role, the wife and the children do not object to this family arrangement, that is to say, they approve of and support the father's going out to work and making money, and are even convinced that this is the father's duty. On the other hand, they disapprove of non-instrumental performance on the part of the father at home. The reactions of Mrs. Lin Yang and the

child, Huang Guosheng, were most obvious: "How can my husband stop working? If he does not work, who is going to take care of the family expenses?. Our forefathers in the village were also like that. Men have to work hard and provide for the entire family!" "It is quite right that father focuses only on working away from the home. My schoolmates' fathers are also like that.... It is already enough that mother takes care of us at home.... It is even a good thing that he works outside! When he is at home, I get beaten whenever I do anything wrong".

From this it can be seen that around half of the fathers (i.e., family economic providers) do not disagree with the traditional interpretation of their role at home; neither do they have any new interpretation. They persist in performing their role at home in a one-dimensional way—as the person who supports the livelihood of the family. Moreover, in the family, the wife's and the children's collusion in the father's one-dimensional, instrumental interpretation of his role makes him feel justified in doing things this way.

## **The Second Category of Fathers: New Way**

There are six fathers in the second category. Their interpretation and performance of their role may be described as variable. That is, as expressed by George H. Mead (1986), Dennis H. Wrong (1976), Daniel B. Bertaux (1982), and Charles H. Cooley (1995), in personal interactions, people are able to give play to their creativity, to change their interpretation of their role, and even to create a brand new interpretation of their own role to suit themselves and the situation.

As the term suggests, a variable or changeable role means that there is not a preset and specific definition of the father's role. And a variable and changeable interpretation means that this group of fathers believe in the possibility of interpreting their role in different ways, as opposed to the performance of the role at home as required by society—the instrumental role. And they try to play their role in multiple ways at home. In general, I can sum up their



multiple interpretations in the rural area of China, using three concepts articulated by Peter L. Berger (1986)—detachment, manipulation, and transformation.

### Detachment

Detachment means that the father tries to interpret his role at home in a way other than that to which he has been accustomed since childhood. He actively plays his role at home in his new way. Among the families interviewed, two fathers interpret themselves by way of detachment.

Mr. Zheng Dingxian is an outstanding representative of detachment. His family has four members, including two daughters. As he readily admits, his understanding of the father's role is rather hazy, as he had no role model after his father's premature death. "When I was very small, around 5 years old, my father fell ill and died.... What did my father do at home? I cannot remember.... Frankly, I have never given thought to the issue of how to perform the role at home. I think fatherhood simply means being a man with children.... Frankly, I don't think it is necessary to follow the example of most fathers. So I just do what I feel I need to do".

The premature death of his father has blurred his understanding of the father's role, so that he relies on instinct in order to perform the role. His wife is going out to work and being able to shoulder the economic expenses of the family has also indirectly prompted him not to interpret his role as an instrumental one. "It is very difficult to find a job in the village. And I cannot afford to set up a small business.... Now my wife works in the town and earns a monthly salary of five to six hundred yuan, which is already enough to provide for the whole family and meet our expenses. So there is no need to worry and I don't urgently have to look for a job".

Although his wife works away from home and returns only once a month, Mr. Zheng Dingxian does not stay at home to look after the daughters full time. Instead, because the two daughters are able to share the housework, he has nothing to do at home and is unclear about his role there. As a result, he defines his role in terms of escape—indulging in gambling all day long. "At home,

I don't have to do anything; sweeping, washing, cooking are all dealt with by my two daughters. With nothing to do at home, how can I stay there like an idiot all day long? So when friends invite me to have fun in the little gambling den, I just go".

From this it can be seen that, although society thinks that the father is the economic provider of the family and has the responsibility of providing material necessities, some fathers do not share this view. Instead, they seek other ways to avoid the role at home and detach themselves from it. Mr. Zheng thinks that the father does not have to express himself through the instrumental role. Because his wife has taken up this role, and his daughters help play his role at home, his role is ever more confusing and he feels deeply perplexed. In order to get rid of the perplexity, he seeks refuge in gambling; through the gambling world, he separates himself from society, withdraws from the original family structure and the original paternal role (i.e., stays far away from the society of the majority of people and from the father's role as defined by the majority). He avoids performing the role decreed by society.

### Manipulation

Manipulation means that although the father plays his role at home in a new way, it is just for his own selfish ends; he looks at his own role from an alternative perspective, maintaining a distance from the role. Two fathers among the interviewees have adopted this approach.

Their understanding of the father's role is confused. When asked about the father's role, they said, "What is a father? I think it means a man with children and respected at home.... Moreover, all matters in the family are decided by him". "Father? It means a man with a family.... The family members listen to and accept his ideas, and let him decide everything". From that it can be seen that they understand father to be a person respected by people and possessing the greatest power at home.

Take the 64-year-old Mr. Zheng Rong for an example. Because of the family's considerable expenses, he does not mind his wife going out to work occasionally. He is also in favour of his wife sharing the role of economic provider with

him. He said, “The family expenses are very heavy; we have to take care of my son and my parents as well as my wife’s mother. In addition, I do not earn much. So my wife occasionally catches shrimps and oysters in order to help out with the family economy”.

On the surface, he conforms to the established role and behaviour prescribed for him by society and endeavours to play the role of the economic provider of the family. In reality, he does not accept what society has decreed. He follows the behaviour prescribed by society just for his own ends—to be approved of by other people. He said, “To me, a father does not necessarily have to be the economic provider of his family. However, as the head of the family, you will be criticized and despised if you do not work at all”.

On the surface, Mr. Zheng Rong approves of the arrangement by which his wife goes out to work and he himself looks after the son and the old parents at home. In reality, he does this partly for another purpose—to win the approval of others. “Unlike certain fathers who go out to work all day long and know nothing about housework, I am good at steaming spare ribs, frying rice, making new year cake, and many people praise me for my cooking skills. They love to eat my new year cake. When the wife goes out to work, the husband will not be approved of by relatives and fellow villagers unless he takes good care of the son and the parents”.

From this it can be seen that Mr. Zheng Rong does not blindly follow the conventional interpretation of the father’s role. Instead, he expresses himself in accordance with the needs of the family (e.g., he shares the family economy together with his wife) and satisfies the needs of the family members. However, his words reveal that he interprets his role in this way partly in order to obtain other people’s praise and approval. In other words, he performs his role at home not only for the sake of the family as a whole, but also for some personal purpose.

Since he has a hidden agenda when performing his role and is privately hostile to this definition of his role, there is a role distance. For example, while people expect him to shoulder the economy of the family in view of his paternal

role, he calculates how to make delicious food for his parents, wife, and son at home in order to win other people’s praise and love.

### Transformation

Among the many interviewed fathers, two interpret themselves by way of transformation. I found that they interpret their role and the way it should be performed at home as capable of variation, including even the complete opposite of what is ordained by society. Unlike the fathers who resort to detachment and manipulation, he is situated not only in a position of change, but also in a position opposite to the conventional father’s role and the way it is enacted at home.

Transformation means that the father expresses his role in a way completely opposite to the conventional one-dimensional way. He does not go out to work all day long in order to provide for the entire family. He is not an economic provider. Instead he appears in the image of the mother and plays the expressive role in Talcott Parsons’ (1955) terms, taking care of the daily life of the kids, sweeping and tidying up the home, washing clothes, etc.

These fathers say, “As a matter of fact, women are also able to earn money. It is not absolutely necessary that men go out to work and provide for the family.... There is nothing wrong with the wife providing for the family...”. “Men are also capable of running the home. For example, I can keep the home smart and tidy”. From these utterances it can be seen that they feel positive about expressing the father’s role in an unconventional way.

Among the interviewed fathers, the 35-year-old Huang Jingtiao is an outstanding representative of transformation. He and his wife have one son and one daughter. Although his mother opposes his staying at home to look after the children, he insists on doing so. He said, “My mother often criticizes me, saying that by letting my wife to go out to work I am not a real man, that I am very irresponsible.... Some villagers, every time they come across me, would urge me to find a job as soon as possible so that my wife does not have to work in town.... In reality, I don’t see any problem.... I don’t understand.... Why is it that

only men can and should go out to work and earn money? Men and women are equal. Wives can also go out to work. Fathers can stay at home and take care of children". Moreover, he said, "Fatherhood is in fact a process of continuous learning, learning how to cook, tidy up and look after the children. It will not do if only the wife can feed, care for and understand children. The father's role cannot remain set in stone". From Mr. Huang's example it can be seen that these fathers adopt an active and positive way to seek change at home, endeavouring to interpret their role in a new way.

Moreover, I found two fathers play their role at home by way of transformation for the sake of the overall interests of the family. In other words, they seek change not simply for reasons of personal self-interest. For example, the 45-year-old Mr. Lin Yitian said, "When my wife finds a stable job with a salary higher than mine, and when my income cannot cover the expenses of the family, why shouldn't I allow her to go out to work?... If my wife has to take care of both family and work, then it will be too much for her.... However, we cannot both go out to work and let the kids stay at home alone either.... So I choose to stay at home and look after the kids".

The idea of fathers adopting transformation (such as expressing themselves through the conventional mother's role) is completely at variance with the conventional father's role. From this it can be seen that their way of thinking is very revolutionary. So much so that, even though these fathers experience social disapproval for choosing to take care of the children and do the housework, they do not give up. Instead they persevere in their new interpretation and are optimistic about it. As Mr. Huang Jintiao says, "We may seem to be in the minority now. But I think that eventually people will come to accept the notion of fathers looking after the children full time at home".

To sum up, the second group of fathers do not hover between the role bestowed on them by society and their own understanding of their role. Neither are they caught between society's definition of their role and their own. They are active, creative, and full of initiative. Because

fathers who adopt detachment and manipulation do not have a preset or consistent definition of their role at home, their understanding of the father's role is more obscure than that of fathers who adopt a strategy of transformation.

The understanding of the wives and children of these three groups of fathers as regards their husbands' or fathers' role at home is clear, lucid, and consistent. That is to say, the wives and children of the second category of fathers approve of and support the way their husbands and fathers perform their role at home. They unanimously think that the father does not necessarily have to play the role of economic provider for the family. They believe the father's role is capable of redefinition. The responses of Zheng Rong's wife and Huang Jinrong's daughter are most striking. Mrs. Zheng said, "I approve of my husband looking after the parents and the kids at home! Whoever has time will look after the old folks and kids. His income alone cannot support the livelihood of the family; the wife also has a duty to help the family economy". The child of Huang said, "It's great that father is always there and I can play with him! I don't feel uneasy at home with him. I don't see anything wrong with father staying at home and mother going out to work!"

### **The Third Category of Fathers: Between the New and the Old Ways**

Among the many fathers of my study, two belong to the third category. As mentioned earlier, the third category of my study refers to the father trapped between the new and the old ways when it comes to enacting their role. As the third category is caught between the first and the second categories, they lack confidence in their interpretation of their role. They find themselves caught in the gap between reform and conformity.

At home, the third category of fathers expresses themselves partly through transformation and partly through detachment. As the description implies, this category of fathers has not thoroughly broken away from the conventional definition of the father's role and behaviour. They just mimic transformation. These fathers

cannot clearly express themselves by way of detachment, manipulation, or transformation, when creating a new version of their role. Instead, in real life, people will express themselves in multiple ways.

Among the fathers who perform their role by way of transformation combined with detachment, the 28-year-old Mr. Huang Jinshu's case is most interesting. He has neither a stable job nor the intention to look for one. He just does occasional part-time jobs. Unlike those who interpret their role by way of transformation, fathers who interpret their role at home by way of partial transformation do not take on aspects of the mother's role. Instead, they act as the children's playmate at home. For example, Mr Huang Jinshu says, "When my wife goes out to work, I look after the kids at home. I play poker and chess, and watch TV with them. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, and housework are taken care of by my eldest daughter, not by me".

Although he sees himself as the children's playmate, he has doubts about what he is doing. In particular, when his friends and relatives criticized his role at home, he did not clearly express confidence in his own defence. He said, "Friends and relatives do not like me staying at home all the time without doing any housework.... In my view, playing with the kids at home can also help me to understand them.... Is there anything wrong with a father playing at home with his kids?" During the interview, I found that he has turned to gambling in order to escape the role he plays at home. He said, "I am unable to provide for my wife and children, nor am I capable of keeping the household in good order. I really don't know how to be a father. Only when I win at bridge do I feel satisfied".

From the example of Huang Jinshu, it can be seen that detachment is connected with a confused understanding of the father's role. He said, "There is really no clear definition of the father's role at home. What can I do? No matter what I do, my family will always find something to complain about". An ambiguous role plus his family and friends objecting to his interpretation make him lose his sense of direction in performing his role. This causes him to feel pressurized

and frustrated. As a result, he withdraws from the father's role and even turns to bridge, in order to reduce the pressure and the time he has to devote to being the father.

Because this group of fathers are very ambivalent about their role and are in the process of exploring it, the opinions of friends and relatives easily influence their attitude to the role and may even influence their self-respect. In addition, I also discovered that the impression left by Mr. Huang Jinshu's father image at home on his wife and children is very ambivalent. For example, his wife said, "The father's role? Not clear. Maybe managing and deciding all issues inside and outside the family!" Also, his children complained, "My schoolfriends' fathers do not always stay at home like mine! Even when a friend's father stays at home, he helps him with his homework. Although my father plays (chess) with me, he often plays bridge at night in the little gambling den in the village!" From this it can be seen that the pressure faced by this category is the greatest, because this type of father has to look himself in the face—to clearly affirm his role at home and the new way of performing his role as invented by himself. In addition, he has to contend with the negative opinions of friends, relatives, and neighbours.

Moreover, among fathers of the third category, I found that Mr. Zheng Wei used to play his role at home in terms of the second category of transformation. However, owing to his wife's strong objections, he gave up playing the mother's role. He said, "Soon after the kid was born, I agreed with my wife that I would take care of the child while my wife went out to work. Unfortunately, not long afterwards, she said it was too stressful for her to shoulder the expenses of the family on her own, and became opposed to my looking after the child at home on a full-time basis. And she kept asking me to find a part-time job".

As a result, Mr. Zheng Wei found a part-time job and began to seek solace in bridge, performing his role through transformation combined with detachment. From this it can be seen that after the second way of interpretation failed, he pursued the second best option and chose the third

category of interpretation (i.e., transformation combined with detachment). No doubt, among my interview samples, there are no instances of a father switching to the first way of interpreting his role at home after the failure of the second way, nor are there instances of switching to the second way of interpretation after the failure of the third. However, as shown by Mr. Zheng Wei's example, such situations may occur.

The reason why the third category of fathers is caught in a contradictory position is as follows. On the one hand, they actively try to develop themselves in a way other than the conventional one (the one-dimensional role). On the other hand, they cannot wholly break away from the conventional role. In respect of the performance of their role at home, they can't make up their minds between the new and old ways of performing their role. They want to give play to their human creativity and develop their role in their own way. But they cannot break out of conventional constraints so that at times they express themselves in the personalized way (i.e., in a way other than the conventional one), and at other times in the conventional (i.e., one-dimensional, instrumental) way. This is exactly what Peter L. Berger (1986) calls alternation.

### Understanding the Role and Feelings About Performance

In the in-depth interviews, through comparing the different fathers' performance at home, I came to understand how they see their role and how they feel about the way they enact it.

Equipped with this understanding, I conclude that fathers are in some ways to be sympathized with as well as respected and loved. What is moving about them is that many fathers recognize the inherent imperfections of their role and the sadness it brings them. "I cannot experience pregnancy and the moment of excruciating pain in giving birth. Indeed, it is undeniable that the close relationship between the child and the mother is long established, and that the father-child relationship suffers by comparison". "For some unknown reason, people always think that the

father has only one role at home (going out to work)". "Sometimes, I really want to put aside my work, stay at home to chat with my kids, and look after my aged father. But the look in people's eyes always tells you that fathers who stay at home during the day are disapproved of".

Some fathers do not passively accept the inherent imperfections of their role. Instead, they keep trying to change the conventional order. "Most people think that men who stay at home to look after children are problem fathers. But I don't think so. On the contrary, I work hard to meet the demands of the role in looking after the kids every day!" What is lovable about them is that in the interviews, I felt their charming side. They work hard to understand their role at home; they work hard to find a way of interpreting their role for themselves; they long for people to accept their version of the role.

Precisely because they are so worthy of sympathy, respect, and love, I cannot but sympathize with the invisible man under the roof—the father.

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### Conclusion

Having completed my study of the father's role in rural Chinese society and how it is interpreted in the home, I have gained an appreciation of the joys and sorrows of fatherhood in its positive and varied forms. This research not only gives me a deeper understanding of the father's role but it also provides me with much to reflect on and many insights into sociology.

In the past, the concepts and theories of sociology made it possible to arrive at an explanation of social phenomena. The phenomena thus explained range from the individual to the whole world. The reason is: in the past, sociologists endeavoured to seek order in change, and deduce constant social laws from diverse social phenomena, and thereby to explain the differences in those phenomena.

In this study, I noted that some fathers still try to seek changes within the framework of their role as already defined by society. This has helped me to understand that, apart from seeking order in change, sociologists should also try to seek



change in order like some of the interviewed fathers. This will help them to find a comprehensive explanation of social phenomena. In other words, they should try to seek different approaches to circumstances already defined by society and hold a positive attitude towards such diversity. Again, it proved that individual free will is somehow powerful and could not be neglected.

This study of the father's role and its interpretation at home is an actual example of seeking change in order. On the one hand, the study tries to find out the fathers' different understandings of their role at home and the diversified ways of interpreting that role. On the other hand, the study tries to seek order in the fathers' different understandings of their role and their different interpretations of that role. It also seeks to summarize their similarities. More importantly, the end product of this search for change in order and order in change comprehensively reflects the pains, conflicts, helplessness, initiative, and creativity of the fathers, so that we may thoroughly understand the complexity of the father's role.

Although the topic of this study is the father's role and how it is interpreted and performed at home, it looks like micro-sociology but is inseparably connected with macro-sociology.

No doubt, this study clearly tells us that our conventional concept of the father's role as the economic provider of the family is changing in the conventional rural Chinese families. Facts tell us of the flexibility, changeability, and plurality of the father's role. Facts also tell us that in the rural Chinese families, fathers are relentlessly endeavouring to debate the definition of their role with society. Some fathers have even broken through the constraints of society's definition of their role at home and tried to give play to their creativity and interpret their role in new ways (such as detachment, manipulation, and transformation), based on their own interpretation of the role and their own preferences. What's more, the changing process is a kind of struggles in between oneself, the family members, and the third party's views. More interestingly, the way that father presents today may lead to a very complicated family roles system, and changing father roles may bring an important movement in future China.

However, as previously mentioned, this study does not only tell us the personal changes being made by some rural Chinese fathers. This kind of change also makes evident two important points: the social importance and dramatic quality of personal change, both involving a macroscopic phenomenon: social change.

The reason why the change in some rural Chinese fathers' role at home can reflect the importance of personal change is because the individual's behaviour is very influential. Individual changes may even produce massive social change. Earl Babbie (1994, p. 189) says, "If a massive social change is possible, from where will it start? How does change start?... The answer is ... it starts from the individual's change... Only people can start social changes and change social systems".

To put it more precisely, social change more often than not starts from the individual. Today we only see a small proportion of rural Chinese fathers trying to change their conventional role at home, but these small individual changes, as time goes by, may create a force to change society's definition of the father's role, and help Chinese society to break away from the old definition. Thus the Chinese father's role will appear in new forms and, in the future, fathers can freely and actively define how they interpret their role at home.

In addition, from this study it can be seen that the change in some rural Chinese fathers' role at home is very dramatic. Mr. Zheng Wei is an example. He has broken away from the conventional father mode (the first category), that is, from the past, and he no longer interprets the father in terms of the one-dimensional economic provider for the family. He looks forward hopefully to the future when he can express himself by way of transformation, the second category. However, because of the wife's objections, he has had to express himself through the second best option, i.e., transformation combined with detachment. This indicates that the individual's trajectory from the conventional to the new mode is non-linear and complex. The dramatic nature of the individual's changes also illustrates the possibility of dramatic social change. As Earl Babbie says (1994), social change has many possibilities.

It can take many forms. The trajectory can be linear, i.e., from tradition to modernity, as well as non-linear.

I will conclude with a quotation from the sociologist, Earl Babbie, because he points out and responds to the theme of my essay—do not underestimate the power of the individual, because the individual's power is strong. So do not neglect the changes made by fathers in the rural Chinese areas. Changes made by a small group of people may start an enormous social movement of change. Earl Babbie (1994, pp. 192–193) says, “Clearly, no individual is a match for a complex social institution. Yet any challenge to an institution must begin with an individual. Ultimately, social systems are inanimate; they can neither respond nor act; the same applies to organizations or groups. Only the individuals involved can decide and act, and in any instance someone must take the first step”. I am looking forward to seeing the many unexpected family role changes in China.

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# The Roles and Contributions of Fathers in Families with School-Age Children in Hong Kong

23

Vicky C. Tam and Rebecca S. Lam

Nowadays parenting has received more public concern because of the changes of parental roles that have heightened awareness of parents' impact on children's development. Contemporary fathers are no longer the only breadwinner in the family as there are more and more mothers employed in the job market. It thus brings to attention about the change in the roles of fathers as a result of increase in maternal employment. Yet recent parenting studies in Hong Kong mostly put their research focus on motherhood, whereas very few have examined fatherhood thoroughly. It is worthy to explore the roles of fathers with school-age children as parents are the major socialization agents at this developmental stage. This chapter examines fathers' roles and contributions to their children's school-related outcomes based on specific paternal attributes including parenting styles and behaviors.

then as a sex role model from 1940 to 1965; and as a nurturer since the mid-1960s. The trend suggests that fathers are increasingly involved in children's lives. Yet, studies on family trends provide little information about father behaviors, and LaRossa (1988) challenged that the culture of fatherhood may be changing more quickly than the actual conduct. Among the limited research information available, the findings of Hall's (2005) study indicate that American fathers in 1997 spent more time with children than their counterparts in 1977. Moreover, the same study shows that younger fathers from both of the two cohorts spent more time with their children than did older fathers. As supported by Hall's study, contemporary American fathers are generally expected to have increased involvement in child-rearing. It is of research significance to examine the actual behaviors of fathers in contemporary Chinese families in Hong Kong.

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## Fatherhood and Social Change

Fatherhood is deemed to be affected by cultures and has undergone social changes. According to LaRossa's (1988) overview of American culture, father was regarded as an aloof breadwinner from the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries;

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## Fatherhood in Chinese Families

Traditional Chinese fatherhood can be reflected through Confucian philosophy. One of the core themes of Confucianism is the Five Cardinal Relationships, which include the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, between father and son, between siblings, between friends, and between husband and wife, and in that order (Bond and Hwang 1986). It is apparent that father-and-son relationship is ranked highly among all human relationships and is considered

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to be the core dimension of family relationships. Furthermore, a rigid gender role differentiation is imposed in traditional Chinese culture (Ho 1987). Chinese fathers are perceived to be responsible for the family income and for coping with external situations that may affect the harmony of the family, whereas mothers attend to the internal matters of the family, including doing housework and taking care of their husbands and children. Fathers are also expected to act as strict disciplinarians who generally keep themselves aloof from their children as soon as the latter reach the school age of about six (Ho 1989; Wu 1996b). Children at this age are supposed to begin to understand the environment better, and it is appropriate for their fathers to start training their moral character. Fathers often monitor and push their children to achieve in school and expect them to learn from good models. Mothers usually act as the agent of nurturance in the family and are sometimes criticized for being so lenient that they may spoil their children (Wu 1996a).

The extent to which traditional role patterns of warm mothers and aloof fathers have changed is still debatable as research studies show inconsistent findings. Shek's (2005) research findings on Hong Kong families with adolescents suggested that mothers' role has changed to be demanding and controlling, replacing fathers as the disciplinarians. Yet other research evidence points to a continuation of the traditional parental role pattern. Lewis and Lamb (2003) analyzed paternal differentiation in various cultures and reported that Chinese fathers in Taiwan seldom played with their children and still performed disciplinary functions more than playmates' roles. Feng's (2002) survey of adolescents and their parents in 14 Chinese cities reported that father-child relationship was less strong than mother-child relationship. This study reveals that mothers understood the children better than the fathers did, and children felt more comfortable talking to their mothers than to their fathers. So far, few studies on fathers have been conducted in Hong Kong. Research carried out in the 1990s showed a continuation of the pattern of aloof, distant fathers who embraced traditional patriarchal values (Law et al. 1994). Mothers were predominantly

involved in housework and child care (Tam 2001), whereas fathers were still reported to play a supplementary role (The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong 1990). In comparing parenting in Hong Kong and Shanghai, Shek et al. (2006) indicated that Hong Kong fathers did not know their children as well as mothers did, nor as well as fathers in Shanghai did. Within Hong Kong families, paternal expectation and paternal control were found to be higher than maternal expectation and maternal control, whereas paternal discipline was lower than maternal discipline. Relative to their counterparts in Shanghai, fathers in Hong Kong had lower expectation, discipline, and control on their children, but their paternal psychological control was stronger than that of the Shanghai fathers. This inter-city comparison, together with the literature reviewed earlier, provides an understanding of fatherhood in Hong Kong by highlighting their peripheral role in the family.

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### **Father's Influence on Child Developmental Outcomes**

Several contemporary studies have focused on paternal attributes and examined their immediate as well as long-term effects on children's socioemotional development. As put forth by Lewis and Lamb (2003) in their review of cross-cultural parenting studies, paternal involvement seemed to predict children's adult adjustment better than maternal involvement did. Moreover, fathers' play styles predicted later socioemotional development of their children; and earlier paternal involvement predicted adult children's feelings of satisfaction in spousal relationships and self-reported parenting skills. Yet, the study of Liu et al. (2004) on Chinese families reported that fathers' parenting style was not a predictor of children's deviant behavior, whereas mothers' indulgent and authoritarian styles were linked to problem behaviors. Findings of Chi's (2002) survey on Primary 5 to Secondary 3 students in Nanjing, China revealed father-child relationship as one of the significant predictors of senior primary school students' self-concept but not for

junior secondary school students. This shows that the older the students, the less the impact of father-child relationship on child's self-concept. In this study, variables related to mothers were included, but were found to be insignificant predictors of child outcomes.

Porter et al. (2005) conducted a study on parental attributes and child outcomes in China and the USA, involving children attending nursery schools/early childhood programs. Findings indicate that child emotionality was positively related to authoritarian parenting of fathers and mothers in both Chinese and American cultures. Besides this, child activity level was linked to more authoritative and less authoritarian parenting styles of both fathers and mothers in the Chinese sample but not in the American sample.

The above studies show that paternal attributes such as father's play style, parenting style, and father-child relationship can have significant impact on children's socioemotional adjustment. In Chinese societies, parents highly regard the quality of their children's education and academic achievement (Wu 1996a). It is thus of interest to find out about Chinese fathers' contribution to children's school-related outcomes as few studies on this topic have been attempted with Chinese populations. While research interest often focuses on academic achievement, evidently it is important to explore multiple aspects of school-related outcomes, including students' belief in regulated learning, expectation for education, as well as self-esteem. Moreover, it has been suggested that parenting research on Chinese families should include multiple dimensions in order to allow a comparison of different parenting attributes in predicting child outcomes (McBride-Chang and Chang 1998). Apart from parenting style, studies can include parenting behaviors related to academic domains and demographic factors.

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### Factors Affecting Father's Performance

Fathers' demographic characteristics can have considerable impact on parenting behaviors and hence child development. The study of Wong

et al. (2003) examined parenting stress among Chinese fathers with children attending kindergartens and primary school in Hong Kong. Their findings indicated that parents with higher educational levels and family income had less parenting stress, and that perceived parenting self-efficacy was likely to moderate the effects of parenting stress on the fathers' mental health. It is therefore of research interest to further explore the impact of demographic characteristics on different aspects of paternal behaviors so as to gain insight on fatherhood in Hong Kong.

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### Research Objectives

The present chapter examines fatherhood in contemporary Chinese families in Hong Kong. The research objectives are threefold. First, this study examines paternal attributes by comparing between fathers and mothers in their parental behaviors. A range of parental attributes have been included, comprising (a) dimensions of parenting style, namely, nurturance and psychological control, and (b) parenting behaviors related to academic domains, namely, involvement in children's education, academic efficacy, values and goals, and aspiration for children's education. Second, this study investigates the influence of demographic factors on father attributes, including age, education attainment, and place of birth. Third, it examines father's unique contribution to school-related child outcomes, including children's academic performance, efficacy in self-regulated learning, aspiration for education, and self-esteem.

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### Methods

#### Sample

This study was part of a research project involving students and parents from 36 intact classes at the levels of Primary Three to Five in six schools in Hong Kong. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to students in school and parents at home. Sample of this study comprised 461 child-mother-father triads who participated in the



project, constituting 41.53% of families reached. There were 208 boys and 253 girls in the sample. Mean ages for the child, father, and mother samples were 10.10, 43.30, and 39.49 years, respectively ( $SDs=1.04$ , 5.27, and 4.29). The average number of children in the family was 2.20 ( $SD=1.11$ ). In terms of education attainment, 24.6% of the fathers and 22.6% of the mothers had received primary school education or lower, whereas 18.2% and 9.1%, respectively, had university education or above. Furthermore, 34.1% and 33.2% of fathers and mothers were migrants born outside of Hong Kong. Results of one-way analysis of variance comparing students across grade levels found children at higher grade levels tended to have older fathers and mothers. There were no significant grade level differences with regard to family background, including family income, parental education attainment, and number of children. Chi-square tests also reported no association between grade level and parents' place of birth.

## Measures

Data were collected using questionnaires written in Chinese, covering research instruments on six parental attributes and four child outcomes as well as questions on demographic characteristics. Parental attributes were assessed separately on fathers and mothers, with data provided by children and parents. Research instruments adapted from English sources were translated by the research team with careful review conducted by two bilingual professionals so as to retain the conceptual content of the items. Reliabilities reported in the sections below were based on data collected for the entire project. The figures were on the whole satisfactory.

### Nurturance and Psychological Control

Two parenting style dimensions, nurturance and psychological pressure, were assessed using the child-report Parent Behavior Report (PBR) (Schludermann and Schludermann 1988), which is an adaptation of Schaefer's (1965) Child's Reports of Parental Behavior Inventory. The PBR is simple and short for administration with children. There are two subscales in the PBR: (1) The

Nurturance subscale, which consists of 12 items that reflect parental expression of affection to the child; and (2) the Psychological Pressure subscale, which comprises ten items, pertaining to parental use of psychological control techniques. Sample items include "My mother/father is a person who shows interest and support" (nurturance) and "My mother/father is a person who often complains about what I did" (psychological pressure). A 3-point Likert-type response format was used (1="Not like my parent"; 2="Somewhat like my parent"; and 3="A lot like my parent"). Item scores on each of the two subscales were summed to give the scores for the variables of parental nurturance and psychological control. Cronbach's alphas reported by fathers and mothers were 0.89 and 0.90 for nurturance and 0.75 and 0.79 for psychological pressure, respectively.

### Parental Involvement in Education

The extent to which parents participated in the educational processes and experiences of their children was assessed using a 6-item self-report scale constructed for this study. The items include "I supervise my child to do his/her homework" and "I approach my child's teacher(s) to discuss his/her academic progress or problems." Responses were collected from fathers and mothers separately on a five-point format (1="never" and 5="always"). Scores across the items were averaged to give a measurement for this variable. Cronbach's alphas reported in this study were 0.77 and 0.69 for fathers and mothers, respectively.

### Parental Academic Efficacy

The scale of parental academic efficacy was adapted from Bandura and Barbaranelli (1996). It measures the extent to which parents feel competent in supervising schoolwork and promoting their child's academic achievement. The scale comprises six parent-report items, including "How much can you do to motivate your child for academic pursuit?" Responses were collected from the fathers and the mothers separately using a 5-point response format (1="not at all" and 5="very well"). Item scores were averaged to give the overall score for this variable. Cronbach's alphas, computed separately for the father and mother samples, were both 0.88.

### Parental Aspiration for Child's Education

The variable was measured using a 7-item scale constructed for the purpose of this research project. Parents indicated their expectation on their child's educational achievement on a 5-point response format (1="strongly disagree" and 5="strongly agree"). Items include "I expect my child to improve his/her academic performance every term." Cronbach's alpha reported for fathers and mothers were 0.69 and 0.72, respectively.

### Parental Values and Goals

Parents' expectation and standards for development and behavior were measured using a 7-item parent-report scale constructed for the purpose of this study. A 5-point response format was used (1="strongly disagree" and 5="strongly agree"). Items include "I want my child to be a good citizen." Cronbach's alpha reported for fathers and mothers were 0.71 and 0.69, respectively.

### Academic Performance

Results of the Hong Kong Attainment Tests (Primary) (HKAT) (Hong Kong Education Department 2000) were provided by the participating schools as a measure of academic performance. The HKAT is a battery of standardized assessment inventories on the three school subjects of Chinese, English, and Mathematics designed by the then Education Department of Hong Kong. At the time of the study, the HKAT was administered annually in all primary schools for assessing and monitoring academic attainment, thus rendering it an objective measure for making comparison across schools. The HKAT has been used in research studies to assess academic attainment (McCall et al. 2000). In this study, standardized scores from the three subject tests were averaged to give measurement of individual students' academic performance.

### Efficacy for Self-Regulated Learning

This scale was adapted from Bandura and Barbaranelli (1996). It comprises seven child-report items (e.g., "How well can you plan and organize your academic activities?") ranked on a 5-point scale (0="not at all" and 4="very well"). Cronbach's alpha for the research project was 0.77.

### Aspiration for Education

This variable was measured by a 6-item self-report scale constructed for the purpose of this study. Each item ranked on a 5-point Likert scale appraises the child's expectation on his or her own educational achievement. Items include "I expect myself to rank the first three in class in terms of academic performance." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.66.

### Self-esteem

Rosenberg's (1989) Self-Esteem Scale was used in this study to measure the child's sense of self-worth. There are 10 items in this self-report instrument (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"), with responses given on a four-point Likert scale (1="strongly disagree" and 4="strongly agree"). Scores from the 10 items were averaged to give a measure of self-esteem. The scale is widely used in studies on self-esteem. In this research project, Cronbach's alpha was reported to be 0.77.

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## Results

Data on the performance of fathers were analyzed and compared to that of the mothers. First, comparisons on parental attributes were made using MANOVA. Second, demographic characteristics that linked to parental attributes were examined. Finally, the unique contribution of fathers to child's academic outcomes was explored using a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses. As preliminary analyses that used one-way ANOVA to compare parental attributes across grade levels showed no significant differences, this factor was dropped from subsequent analyses.

### Comparing Paternal and Maternal Attributes

Intercorrelations among the parental variables and child outcome variables included in this study were presented in Table 23.1. Bivariate correlations between father attributes and those between mother attributes were mostly significant, with Pearson's *r* coefficients ranging from -0.22 to 0.65 for father attributes and -0.16 to 0.66 for mother attributes.

**Table 23.1** Intercorrelations for parental attributes with child outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Nurturance	–	–0.14**	0.20**	0.19**	0.13**	0.08	0.05	0.30**	0.18**	0.22**
2. Psychological control	–0.16**	–	–0.03	0.00	–0.07	–0.09	–0.20**	–0.09	0.01	–0.22**
3. Academic efficacy	0.13**	–0.10*	–	0.44**	0.22**	0.22**	0.07	0.12*	–0.05	0.03
4. Involvement in education	0.17**	–0.07	0.40**	–	0.19**	0.20**	–0.02	0.10*	–0.01	0.04
5. Aspiration for child's education	0.10*	–0.07	0.26**	0.22**	–	0.65**	0.13**	0.12*	0.10*	0.06
6. Values and goals	0.07	–0.06	0.27**	0.30**	0.66**	–	0.10*	0.10*	0.06	0.06
7. Academic performance	0.10*	–0.10*	0.23**	0.08	0.13**	0.11*	–	0.12**	0.23	0.09
8. Efficacy for self-regulated learning	0.34**	–0.06	0.25**	0.23**	0.10*	0.18**	0.12**	–	0.31**	0.38**
9. Aspiration for education	0.28**	0.01	0.03	0.07	0.12**	0.07	0.23**	0.31**	–	0.15**
10. Self-esteem	0.22**	–0.18**	0.09	0.13**	0.07	0.12*	0.09	0.38**	0.15**	–

Note: Intercorrelations for father's attributes and mother's attributes are presented above and below the diagonal, respectively

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

To take into account these correlations among parental attributes, MANOVA procedures were used for the comparison of paternal and maternal performances. This helped control Type I error. A Doubly Repeated Measures MANOVA on the six parental attributes as dependent variables with parental gender as a within-subjects factor was performed. Results of the MANOVA showed that Wilk's Lamda was significant with a value of 0.58,  $F(6, 444) = 54.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.42$ . Univariate ANOVAs reported significant father–mother difference across all parental attributes,  $ps < 0.05$ , except psychological control (see Table 23.2). Mothers consistently performed better than fathers in terms of nurturance, academic efficacy, and involvement in education, and mothers held higher aspiration for child's education as well as values and goals for child development.

### Demographic Characteristics and Parental Attributes

The relationships between demographic characteristics and parental attributes were examined separately for fathers and mothers using correlational

analyses and MANOVAs. Bivariate correlations computed between parental age and parental attributes showed no significant results for both fathers and mothers, except for the coefficient between father's age and aspiration for child's education,  $r = 0.127$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

A series of four Multivariate Analyses of Variance models on the six parental attributes by education attainment and place of birth were computed separately on fathers and mothers. All four models were significant (see Table 23.3). Wilk's Lamdas for the models on father's and mother's education attainment and father's and mother's places of birth were 0.86, 0.87, 0.95, and 0.94,  $F_s(6, 444) = 5.77, 5.42, 3.92$ , and  $4.46$ ,  $ps < 0.01$ ,  $\eta^2_s = 0.07, 0.07, 0.05$ , and  $0.06$ , respectively. Univariate analyses on father's education attainment found significant differences in the paternal attributes of nurturance, involvement in education, and academic efficacy,  $F_s(2, 449) = 5.02, 14.58$ , and  $26.02$ ,  $ps < 0.01$ ,  $\eta^2_s = 0.02, 0.06$ , and  $0.10$ , respectively. No significant differences due to father's education attainment were reported with psychological control, aspiration for child's education, and values and goals. Results with mothers were quite similar. Significant differences

**Table 23.2** Multivariate and univariate analyses of variance for parent's sex for parental attributes

	Father		Mother		Univariate F (1, 449)	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD		
Nurturance	22.11	4.72	25.05	4.61	183.82**	0.29
Psychological control	17.09	3.86	16.78	4.23	2.74	0.01
Involvement in education	2.52	0.72	2.99	0.70	137.59**	0.23
Academic efficacy	3.14	0.83	3.23	0.79	4.78*	0.01
Aspiration for child's education	4.11	0.45	4.17	0.46	6.88**	0.02
Values and goals	4.33	0.37	4.38	0.36	11.19**	0.02

Note: Multivariate  $F$  ratios were generated from Wilk's lambda statistic=0.58,  $F(6,444)=54.38$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $\eta^2=0.42$   
 \* $p<0.05$ ; \*\* $p<0.01$

due to mother's education attainment were reported with the maternal attributes of nurturance, involvement in education, academic efficacy, and values and goals,  $F_s(2, 451)=3.10, 21.00, 16.98$ , and  $9.72$ ,  $p_s<0.05$ ,  $\eta^2_s=0.01, 0.09, 0.07$ , and  $0.04$ , respectively. Post hoc analyses reported that parents, fathers and mothers alike, with higher educational attainment were more involved in education, and more efficacious in supervising children's school work. As for nurturance, the attribute was found to increase with educational attainment among fathers, whereas among mothers it was those with secondary school education who were the most nurturant. Finally, for the groups of mothers only, values and goals increased with educational attainment.

For the demographic characteristic of place of birth, results were similar for fathers and mothers. Significant differences due to place of birth were found in parental involvement in education and aspiration for child's education for fathers,  $F_s(1, 449)=6.83$  and  $7.29$ ,  $p_s<0.01$ ,  $\eta^2_s=0.02$  and  $0.02$ , and mothers,  $F_s(1, 449)=4.32$  and  $11.92$ ,  $p_s<0.05$ ,  $\eta^2_s=0.01$  and  $0.03$ , respectively. Migrant fathers and mothers alike held higher aspiration for their child's education but were less involved in education than their local-born counterparts. No difference due to place of birth was reported with the attributes of nurturance, psychological control, parental efficacy, and values and goals.

### Predicting Child Outcomes by Paternal and Maternal Attributes

To examine fathers' unique contribution to child outcome, a series of hierarchical regression analyses

was conducted on the four dependent variables of academic performance, efficacy for self-regulated learning, child's aspiration for education, and self-esteem with the six parental attributes as predictors. Maternal predictors were entered into the regression model at Step 1 while paternal predictors were added to the model at Step 2. The values of  $R^2$  change reflected the unique contribution of paternal attributes above and beyond that of maternal attributes in the prediction of school-related child outcomes.

Results of the hierarchical regression analyses were summarized in Table 23.4. At Step 1, all four models with maternal attributes only were significant, with  $R^2=0.07, 0.18, 0.10, 0.09$ ,  $F_s(6, 443)=5.18, 16.20, 7.72$ , and  $6.84$ ,  $p_s<0.01$  for academic performance, efficacy for self-regulated learning, aspiration for education, and self-esteem, respectively. At Step 2, paternal predictors were entered.  $R^2$ s were significant and reported to be  $0.11, 0.21, 0.10$ , and  $0.12$ ,  $F_s(12, 437)=4.32, 9.38, 4.20$ , and  $4.78$ ,  $p_s<0.01$ , respectively. At the same time,  $R^2$  changes were significant for the models on academic performance, efficacy for self-regulated learning, and self-esteem, with values of  $0.04, 0.03$ , and  $0.03$ ,  $F_s(6, 437)=3.30, 2.28$ , and  $2.59$ ,  $p_s<0.05$ , respectively, but not for the model on aspiration for education. Hence, father attributes have unique and significant contribution to the prediction of three child outcomes above and beyond that by mother attributes.

For the full models in Step 2, significant paternal predictors were: Father nurturance for the predictions of efficacy for self-regulated learning ( $\beta=0.16$ ,  $t=3.11$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and self-esteem ( $\beta=0.12$ ,  $t=2.09$ ,  $p<0.05$ ); and father psychological control for the predictions of academic

**Table 23.3** Multivariate and univariate analyses of variance for demographic characteristics for parental attributes

Variable	ANOVA											
	MANOVA		Nurturance		Psychological control		Involvement		Academic efficacy		Aspiration for child's education	
	df	F	df	F	df	F	df	F	df	F	df	F
Education attainment – father	12, 888	5.77**	2, 449	5.02**	2, 449	0.76	2, 449	14.58**	2, 449	26.02**	2, 449	0.10
Education attainment – mother	12, 892	5.42**	2, 451	3.10*	2, 451	0.68	2, 451	21.00**	2, 451	16.98**	2, 451	2.23
Place of birth – father	6, 444	3.92**	1, 449	2.66	1, 449	0.02	1, 449	6.83**	1, 449	0.76	1, 449	7.29**
Place of birth – mother	6, 444	4.46**	1, 449	1.03	1, 449	0.57	1, 449	4.32*	1, 449	0.20	1, 449	11.92**

Note: Multivariate *F* ratios were generated from Wilk's lambda statistic

\**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01



**Table 23.4** Hierarchical regressions predicting child outcomes with parental attributes

Step and predictor variable	Step 1				Step 2				$\Delta R^2$
	<i>B</i>	SEB	$\beta$	$R^2$	<i>B</i>	SEB	$\beta$	$R^2$	
Outcome: Academic performance				0.07**				0.11**	0.04**
Nurturance—mother	0.13	0.11	0.06		0.15	0.13	0.07		
Psychological Control—mother	−0.18	0.12	−0.07		0.11	0.14	0.04		
Academic efficacy—mother	2.74	0.71	0.20**		2.82	0.80	0.21**		
Involvement in education—mother	−0.51	0.80	−0.03		−0.46	0.82	−0.03		
Aspiration for child's education—mother	1.72	1.45	0.07		0.89	1.58	0.04		
Values and goals—mother	0.32	1.89	0.01		.06	2.01	0.00		
Nurturance—father					−0.04	0.13	−0.02		
Psychological control—father					−0.60	0.15	−0.21**		
Academic efficacy—father					−0.32	0.76	−0.02		
Involvement in education—father					−0.66	0.80	−0.04		
Aspiration for child's education—father					2.53	1.61	0.11		
Values and goals—father					−1.00	1.88	−0.03		
Outcome: efficacy for self-regulated learning				0.18**				0.21**	0.03*
Nurturance—mother	0.04	0.01	0.30**		0.03	0.01	0.22**		
Psychological control—mother	0.00	0.01	0.01		0.01	0.01	0.04		
Academic efficacy—mother	0.13	0.04	0.15**		0.16	0.05	0.19**		
Involvement in education—mother	0.09	0.05	0.10*		0.07	0.05	0.07		
Aspiration for child's education—mother	−0.13	0.09	−0.09		−0.19	0.09	−0.13*		
Values and goals—mother	0.29	0.11	0.15**		0.33	0.12	0.17**		
Nurturance—father					0.02	0.01	0.16**		
Psychological control—father					−0.01	0.01	−0.05		
Academic efficacy—father					−0.03	0.05	−0.04		
Involvement in education—father					0.02	0.05	0.02		
Aspiration for child's education—father					0.12	0.10	0.08		
Values and goals—father					−0.14	0.11	−0.08		
Outcome: aspiration for education				0.10**				0.10**	0.01
Nurturance—mother	0.03	0.01	0.29**		0.03	0.01	0.25**		
Psychological control—mother	0.01	0.01	0.07		0.01	0.01	0.07		
Academic efficacy—mother	−0.02	0.04	−0.03		0.01	0.04	0.01		
Involvement in education—mother	0.01	0.04	0.02		0.01	0.04	0.01		
Aspiration for child's education—mother	0.13	0.07	0.11		0.12	0.08	0.10		
Values and goals—mother	−0.02	0.10	−0.02		−0.05	0.10	−0.03		
Nurturance—father					0.01	0.01	0.06		
Psychological control—father					0.00	0.01	0.01		
Academic efficacy—father					−0.06	0.04	−0.10		
Involvement in education—father					−0.01	0.04	−0.01		
Aspiration for child's education—father					0.02	0.08	0.02		
Values and goals—father					0.04	0.10	0.03		
Outcome: self-esteem				0.09**				0.12**	0.03*

(continued)

**Table 23.4** (continued)

Step and predictor variable	Step 1				Step 2				$\Delta R^2$
	<i>B</i>	SEB	$\beta$	$R^2$	<i>B</i>	SEB	$\beta$	$R^2$	
Nurturance—mother	0.02	0.00	0.17**		0.01	0.01	0.12*		
Psychological control—mother	−0.02	0.00	−0.15**		−0.01	0.01	−0.06		
Academic efficacy—mother	0.00	0.03	0.01		0.01	0.03	0.02		
Involvement in education—mother	0.05	0.03	0.08		0.04	0.03	0.06		
Aspiration for child's education—mother	−0.05	0.06	−0.05		−0.05	0.07	−0.05		
Values and goals—mother	0.13	0.08	0.10		0.14	0.08	0.11		
Nurturance—father					0.01	0.01	0.12*		
Psychological control—father					−0.02	0.01	−0.16**		
Academic efficacy—father					−0.01	0.03	−0.02		
Involvement in education—father					−0.01	0.03	−0.01		
Aspiration for child's education—father					0.00	0.07	0.00		
Values and goals—father					−0.04	0.08	−0.03		

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

performance ( $\beta = -0.21$ ,  $t = -3.89$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $t = -2.92$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Significant maternal predictors were: mother nurturance for the predictions of self-regulated learning ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $t = 4.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $t = 2.30$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); mother academic efficacy for the predictions of academic performance ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $t = 3.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and efficacy for self-regulated learning ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 3.40$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); and mother values and goals and mother aspiration for the prediction of efficacy for self-regulated learning,  $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $t = 2.76$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and  $\beta = -0.13$ ,  $t = -2.06$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , respectively.

## Discussion

This study sets out to examine the roles and contributions of Hong Kong Chinese fathers. The investigation is unique in four aspects. First, the study included multiple dimensions of father attributes. Second, the focus on children's school-related outcomes is a rare attempt among studies on Chinese fatherhood. Third, data were collected from multiple sources, including fathers, mothers, and children, thus allowing the input of multiple perspectives. Finally, the performance of fathers was juxtaposed with that of the mothers, allowing an examination of the differential parental roles

and contributions in Chinese families. Results of this study were examined with regard to the roles of fathers in Hong Kong families and their contribution to children's school-related outcomes. Discussion will be made on promoting father involvement as well as further research on Chinese fatherhood.

## Father's Roles in Chinese Families in Hong Kong

Results of this study showed that the roles of Chinese fathers in Hong Kong follow the traditional cultural patterns to a certain extent. Compared to mothers, fathers of school-age children were less nurturant, less involved in child's education, and less efficacious in promoting child's schoolwork. They also held lower aspiration for child's education and values and goals for child development. Overall speaking, the roles of Hong Kong fathers in child-rearing were peripheral when compared to that of the mothers. It seems that while there is a high labor force participation rate of 49.6% among married women in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2007), the phenomenon has yet to bring about a concomitant increase in fathers' participation in the family.

Two interesting observations are noted when results of this study are compared to Shek's study (2005) on Hong Kong families with adolescent children that reports a different pattern of strict mothers and kind fathers. First, the discrepancy in parental role pattern found between these two studies provides preliminary evidence of specificity in parental role pattern due to developmental stage of the child in Hong Kong families. Unlike their adolescent counterparts, school-aged children have warm mothers, and their parents were similar in their level of control. These younger children have yet to deal with autonomy development issues, which are commonly faced by adolescents, and they are consequently less likely to attend to discrepancy in parental control. Second, similar to the observation in this study on the peripheral role of fathers, Shek (2005) pointed to the central role or heavy involvement of mothers in basic socialization and caregiving tasks compared to fathers in explaining the observed parental role pattern among families with adolescents.

### **Demographic Factors Affecting Paternal Attributes**

Analyses in this study examined the influence of demographic characteristics on paternal attributes. The overall pattern of impact of demographic factors on paternal performance was found to be similar to that for mothers across all three demographic characteristics examined. It indicates that attributes for fathers and mothers were subject to similar social and personal influences.

In this study, education attainment was found to be a prominent demographic factor that affects fathers' behaviors. Better educated fathers were more nurturant, more involved in education, and more efficacious in promoting their child's schoolwork than the less educated ones. As parental education attainment is an indicator of socioeconomic status of the family, the findings suggest that the more socially advantaged families are likely to be equipped with resources and cultural capital that enhance fathers' performance. Such findings echo studies on the link between socioeconomic status and parental involvement (Lee and Bowen 2006).

Information on age and place of birth provides a glimpse into possible cohort effect on the conduct of fatherhood. Older fathers and those who migrated from mainland China are often expected to adopt Chinese cultural values and hold more traditional views on parenting roles. Yet our results show a weak cohort effect as age did not correlate with any of the parental attributes observed. Moreover, place of birth was found to link to two parental attributes, namely, aspiration for child's education and involvement in education, but not to parenting style, efficacy, or values and goals. This emphasis on education among migrant fathers supports the observation made on immigrants in the United States (Ogbu 1992) as well as in Hong Kong (Tam and Lam 2005) that migrants who move voluntarily to a new community often strongly endorse academic success as a path to get ahead. Migrant parents thus generally hold high expectation of their children's schooling as a means for social mobility. Yet, at the same time, migrant fathers of school-age children in Hong Kong were less involved in their children's education than their local-born counterparts. It is likely that they are discouraged from participating in children's schooling as they are not familiar with the local education system. As suggested by Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (Lareau 2001), the discordance between the culture of migrant families and the culture of larger society posed structural constraints for participation in children's education process. This gap between expectation on children's education and effort to enhance school outcomes is an area that deserves policy attention.

### **Father's Contribution to School-Related Performance**

Results of this study support earlier findings on the significant roles of fathers in children's lives (Day and Lamb 2004). It was shown that fathers made unique contribution to child's school-related performance in the areas of academic performance, efficacy for self-regulated learning and self-esteem beyond that of mothers. It was only with aspiration for education that fathers did not

make contribution to its prediction on top of mothers. Thus the findings provide strong support to the importance of fathers in enhancing children's school-related performance. Even though fathers were less involved in children's education than mothers, they nonetheless exerted significant influence over offspring's intellectual development. Results of this study showed that it was through dimensions of parenting style, namely, nurturance and psychological control, that fathers contributed to children's school-related performance. In other words, fathers exerted their influence on children through parenting behaviors that convey a general emotional climate expressed by parental behavior, such as tone of voice, body language, and bursts of temper (Darling and Steinberg 1993). Father's parenting practices that comprise specific content and socialization goals in circumscribed socialization domains, namely, aspiration for child's education, values and goals, academic efficacy, and involvement in education, were observed to be less influential on child outcome than parenting styles.

The situation was different with mothers' contribution to the prediction of school-related outcomes. For mothers, significant predictors covered a spectrum of parenting style dimensions and education-related parenting practices. While maternal involvement was not a prominent predictor of child outcomes, mother's aspiration for child's education, values and goals, and academic efficacy predicted academic performance and efficacy for self-regulated learning significantly. The parenting style dimension of nurturance also proved to be a significant predictor of self-esteem and efficacy for self-regulated learning. The more prominent influence of parenting practices in the prediction of school-related outcomes among mothers is likely to link to their heavier involvement in children's schoolwork.

### Promoting Father Involvement

Findings of this study support the significant role of fathers in enhancing children's school-related outcomes. Nurturant fathers with low psychological control are likely to have children with better

educational success. Yet such paternal attributes deviate from the traditional pattern of fatherhood in Chinese families. In such regards, Hong Kong fathers need to be encouraged to increase their involvement in children's lives by showing warmth and concern as well as promoting psychological autonomy to their offspring. Parenting education highlighting these emphases should be provided for fathers. These programs should target fathers with low education attainment who often show favorable parenting behaviors. The encouragement of migrant fathers to participate in children's education can be considered through effective home-school partnership programs.

Public policies should be planned to encourage paternal engagement by taking into consideration men's roles as fathers. In Hong Kong, little policy attention has been paid to issues of paternal involvement. Public policy and program planning should begin to address measures supporting the participation of fathers in families for the purpose of enhancing development of the next generation. This includes work and family policies such as paternity leave that targets at reducing parenting stress, tax measures that affect fathers and children such as tax exemption for stay-home fathers, child care provisions, and income support for low-income fathers (Lero et al. 2006). Such measures are likely to benefit fathers of low income and low educational attainment who need extra support and resources to fulfill their paternal roles.

### Future Research on Chinese Fatherhood

This study offers a glimpse into the behaviors of Chinese fathers in Hong Kong and its impact on children's school-related outcomes. Results show similarities to studies conducted in Western cultures as fathers are often observed to be less nurturant and less involved than mothers, but yet they offer unique contributions to the development of their offspring (Lewis and Lamb 2003). While the social contexts may differ across cultures, the roles and contributions of fathers appear to carry universal elements, at least to some extent.

Further research on Chinese fatherhood is much needed as few empirical studies have been

conducted in this area. Future research attention should focus on fatherhood in different Chinese communities around the world, as well as on families with children at different developmental stages.

Findings of this study were limited by its cross-sectional design. While the results were interpreted under the assumption of parenting affecting child outcomes, it is possible that child characteristics reciprocally affect parenting style and behaviors. The intricate relationship between parenting and child outcomes will have to be untangled by studies adopting longitudinal designs. By tracking changes in father behavior, the design also has the potential to shed light on changes in parental roles and performances specific to child developmental stage. Furthermore, much research has been taken in Western societies on the possible effect of father involvement on men's psychosocial well-being (Palkovitz 2002). Yet few studies on this area have been attempted on Chinese families. Hence future research on fatherhood in Chinese families should explore this area.

It should be noted that the pool of parental predictors included in the multiple regression analyses on school-related outcomes only managed to explain a low to moderate amount of variances. This may be due to fact that multiple data sources were engaged in this study, thus lowering the influence of common method variance. It is also likely that parental variables on their own can only explain a limited portion of child outcomes. As suggested by Collins et al. (2000), future research on parental influence should acknowledge the importance of the interplay of parent and child characteristics as well as emphasize its inter-related effects with nonfamilial influences and the role of the broader context on child outcome.

Finally, as delimited by the research focus and objectives, this study examines the profiles and contributions of father involvement using a quantitative approach. Examination on interactional dynamics among the father, the child, and even the mother within the same family will provide in-depth understanding that informs enhancement of parental functioning and child development. Research using qualitative methodologies has much to offer in these respects.

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# East and West: Exploration of the Father-Son Conflict in Chinese Culture from the Perspective of Family Triangulation in the West and the Classical Opera Stories of the East

Simon T. M. Chan

## The Father-Son Dyad in Traditional Chinese Culture

The father-son dyad is one of the five cardinal relationships (五倫) in Chinese culture. Both the father and the son should have clear positions within the family context, such that the son should conform to the concept of filial piety, and the father should advise in whatever context is required, by, for example, acting as the principal to the son (父為子綱).

Hsu (1967) asserts that father-son identification is at the core of the Chinese kinship system. In *Clan, Caste, and Club*, Hsu (1963) states that the Chinese family system is characterized by the dominance of the father-son relationship, in contrast to the dominance of the mother-son relationship in the Hindu system and the dominance of the husband-wife relationship in the Western system. The most important features of the father-son relationship are continuity, inclusiveness, and mutual dependence (Hsu 1963), which are typical features of patrilineal social systems. The responsibilities and expectations of father and son are clearly stated: father and son should be united to face outside enemies. The following

are corresponding Chinese proverbs: 養不教,父之過 (It is the fault of the father if the son is not properly disciplined); 虎父無犬子 (A competent father does not have a weak son); 上陣不離父子兵 (Father and son fight on the same front); 父慈子孝 (Kind father and filial son); and 父子有親 (Close father-son relationship).

Both filial piety and the cardinal relationships (五倫) two imply that the son should be obedient to the father in Chinese culture. In clinical sessions, it is observed that the son fights the father, even when the latter tries to accommodate the needs of the son. Hence, a question sometimes pondered is whether there is any concept or value in Western culture that justifies the son's rejection of the father. Before answering this question, it is recognized that filial piety is the other important Chinese concept that governs the father-son relationship.

## Expectations of the Father-Son Role as Defined in the Concept of Filial Piety

Filial piety has been cited as one of the guiding principles in the parent-child relationship (楊國樞 1998). Two significant implications underlying filial piety are first, the expectation that the child will "return favors" (specifically, a son's filial response to his father's loving kindness; 回報親恩, 子孝報答父慈), which implies an affective and mutually beneficial relationship between parent and child, and second, a power relationship

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in which the father assumes a role as principal to the son (父為子綱), and in which the son conforms to the superior father.

The author of *Classic of Filial Piety* points out in Chap. 1 that filial piety is the foundation of all virtues, the fountain from which all teachings spring, and the great immutable rule that “begins with service of the parents, proceeds to serve the emperor, and is consummated in establishing oneself in the world and attaining achievements.” In Chap. 9, the author stresses: “Of all creatures in the world, man is the noblest. Of all the acts of man, there is none greater than filial piety. In filial piety, there is nothing greater than the reverence for one’s father (天地之性、人為貴。人之行、莫大於孝，孝莫大於嚴父).” In Chap. 11, the author mentions that filial piety is the most important moral conduct of the wise. On the other hand, of all crimes, failure to cultivate filial piety is the greatest (五刑之屬三千，而罪莫大於不孝) and “the root of great disorder (此大亂之道也).”

The above literature on the father–son relationship in Chinese culture is largely based on the belief that filial piety is an important principle that most people should follow. For a Chinese son to fight his own father, he has to have a very strong justification.

By contrast, some literature challenges such a concept of filial piety and echoes the phenomenon of the father–son battle. A typical example is *Nuozhe Storming the Sea* (封神榜之哪吒鬧海). According to Ho (1987), “The father was typically characterized as a stern disciplinarian, more concerned with the demands of propriety and necessity than with feelings, who was to be feared by the child; and the mother as affectionate, kind, protective, lenient, and even indulgent.” This suggests that Chinese fathers and mothers are contrasting in nature (Shek 1994, 2000). According to Ho (1987), this stereotypical view of the differentiation of parental roles is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Shek (1994, 2000) further states that gender differences in parenting do exist in Chinese culture and that fathers are perceived to be relatively strict and less kind than mothers. Therefore, we have popular sayings or proverbs such as “Strict

father, kind mother” (嚴父慈母) and “Hatred binds fathers and sons” (無仇不成父子).

Of course, we cannot treat Chinese culture as monolithic; even in an authoritarian society, we can find differences within the culture. Cooklin (2002) also reminds us that the notion of a particular “way” to work with particular types of families carries the danger of imposing a stereotype that does not do justice to the complexity of the factors currently shaping individual clients’ lives. We cannot say that filial piety is the only principle to guide the parent–child relationship in this decade, but we do believe that there is a rationale in Chinese culture that can justify the son’s violation of filial piety, which is still a guide to daily interaction among the Chinese. Of course, this rationale may not be explicitly mentioned, and this study aims to explore the concept behind it. Hall (1990) states that “culture is not always visible, and it hides most effectively from its own people”; it is thus worth asking if there is a concept in Chinese culture that can justify the son’s fight against the father.

Furthermore, while Ho (1987) and Shek (1994, 2000) referred to one special feature of the father–son relationship, their intention was to describe the father–son dyadic relationship by reference to the mother–son relationship. The mother–son relationship was contrasted with the father–son dyad, and although they did not mention the role of the mother in the father–son dyad, the formation of the father–mother–son triad was highlighted. We can therefore say that the father–son dyad exists in the context of the father–mother–son triad in which we should study the role of the mother as well in the issue of the father–son battle (Mackey and Immerman 2004; Shek 2000). As Lindsey and Caldera (2006) stated, mother and father’s interaction with their child in triadic setting is different from in the dyadic setting.

It is especially the latter alternative of rebellion against the father that raises the question on the existence of any concept in Western culture that justifies the son’s violation of filial piety. In fact, there are many similarities when we try to compare the father–son conflict in Western and Chinese cultures. The two outstanding similarities are father–son as strangers and mother–son in intimate relationships. However, both features

seem to be more accepted and taken for granted in Chinese families, with the latter being especially admired as a norm. Moreover, while we cannot find any hint of painful experience or confusion over the identity of the son in the process of triangulation in the Chinese context (Chan 2009a, b), it is explicit in the Oedipus complex. Hence, it is doubted that cultural differences between Western and Chinese families or any concept in the Chinese culture, which stresses filial piety, can explain the father-son conflict. One example is the existence of the concept of filial piety in Chinese culture whereby the son is taught to be obedient to his parents, which in turn invalidates the Western concept of individuation whereby the son is encouraged to rebel against the expectations of his parents.

### The Concept of Family Triangulation in the West

Triangulation is one of the eight interlocking concepts in the Bowenian theory. They are differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional systems, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, emotional cutoff, and societal regression.

Bowen (1976) defined the triangle as “the smallest stable relationship system.” Bowen pointed out the instability in the two-person emotional system. When there is stress, such instability would finally trigger a three-person system in which more than three people become a series of interlocking triangles. He stated that the function of a triangle is to stabilize the two-person system when it is in danger of disintegrating. If two people can get interested in or be distracted by a third person, object, issue, or fantasy, they can avoid facing the real, threatening, or disturbing issues that exist between them. Ultimately, the triangle helps them to avoid changing themselves and their problem. By contrast, two people sharing a common interest or activity in a healthy way or working through a conflict can nourish and enrich their relationship.

The concept of triangulation can be summarized and defined as detouring conflict between two people by involving a third person who

stabilizes the relationship between the original pair in the process (Nichols and Schwartz 2008). In the context of the father-mother-son triad, if the son is attached too closely to the mother, he will adopt the emotions of the mother, resulting in emotional fusion.

Guerin et al. (1996), followers of the Bowenian theory, stated that activating a triangle is an automatic and emotional process, and does not imply conscious awareness. An established triangle can be activated and reactivated anytime or can be duplicated in another generation. This implies that more closeness and fusion of the emotions of either dyad in the triangle will further deepen the triangulation and even interlock triangles in the next generation.

The concept of triangulation was also further developed by second-generation Bowenian therapists in the book “*Working with Relationship Triangles*” (Guerin et al. 1996), which tells the story of how the notion of threesomes, triads, and eventually triangles come into family therapy and psychological thinking. The structure, process, movement, and function of relationship triangles, and the clinical techniques relevant to them, are addressed. As a matter of fact, instead of using the term “relationship triangle,” the term “triangulation” is commonly used in the field, and this term will be adopted in this study as well.

The concept of triangulation has been widely adopted in the field of family therapy. Satir (1991) perceived that people come into this world as part of the primary triad: mother, father, and child. This triad is regarded as the most influential of all systems. In his book *Leaving Home*, Haley (1980) highlighted the symptomatic distress of troubled young runaways as a reaction to the conflict of the parents. The parents joined together to deal with these strange symptoms and even hospitalize their young children. Finally, the patient became better in the hospital and started employing their autonomy properly. In this way, the parents’ relationship improved. In contrast, the parents’ marriage cannot survive if they are left alone to face each other. Their relationship would get worse and fail to work for the sake of their children. Consequently, their children would suffer from the symptoms and cannot be cured.

The complexity of the family triangle is also analyzed in the structural school, albeit in different terms. In this context, the concept of triangulation is articulated as a dysfunctional boundary between two subsystems (Chan 2009a, b). Father and son's enmeshment reflects the relationship between the father and the mother. Minuchin and Nichols (1993) stressed the concept of cross-generational coalition and detouring conflict between subsystems, namely, the parental and sibling systems. Detouring conflict means that parents place their focus on a child when they fail to resolve their own conflict. The child thus becomes victimized or a scapegoat. In other words, the child is absorbed into a conflict within the parental subsystem in which the child is rather passive, and the parental conflict is the main source of such incidents (Chan 2009a, b).

An alternative but equally common pattern is for parents to conduct their arguments through the child. The father might say that the mother is too permissive, while she might say that he is too strict. He may withdraw, causing her to criticize his handling of the child, which in turn causes further withdrawal. Mother and child are enmeshed, and the mother responds to the child's needs with excessive concern and devotion. The disengaged father tends not to respond even when a response is necessary. Both may be critical of the other's way, but both perpetuate the other's behavior through their own. The result is a cross-generational coalition between the mother and the child which excludes the father.

Evidence of the concept of triangulation can be found in the 10 years of research carried out in the structural school of family therapy about "psychosomatic families" (Minuchin and Rosman 1978). Families with psychosomatic patients are conceptualized into five types of family transactions, namely, enmeshment, overprotection, conflict avoidance, rigidity, and the involvement of the symptomatic child in detouring conflict. The fifth type is the typical example of family triangulation. Minuchin and Rosman (1978) claimed that the anorectic child was used to diffuse stress and maintain pseudo-harmony in the family.

The concept of triangulation has been further studied in terms of the nature of marital distress and its impact on the child. John Gottman and his

colleagues (Gottman 1994; Gottman et al. 1998) stressed the crucial importance of emotional engagement and comforting, soothing interactions in relationship definition. Katz and Gottman (1993) captured two models of parental response: "demand and withdrawal" and "mutually hostile." The child would tend to internalize the parental problem in the former way while externalizing the parental problem in the latter way. In a clinical setting, the pattern of demand and withdrawal exists in cases where a child has psychosomatic, emotional, or passive-aggressive problems.

John Gottman (1994) revealed the power of emotion and particular cycles of interaction to define the quality of love relationships. Distressed relationships are characterized by absorbing states of negative effect and interactions in which partners blame, criticize, and withdraw from each other. A pattern of interaction in which one partner criticizes while the other withdraws and shuts down is particularly predictive of divorce. The couple's facial expressions of emotion, for instance, the wife expressing contempt and the husband showing fear, also predict the future disruption of the relationship.

Even in the face of such a challenge, and despite the fact that the field of family therapy went through many changes from Modernism to Post-modernism, triangulation was still enlisted as one of the 12 enduring concepts in the field by Nichols and Schwartz (2008). They further stated that most family problems are triangular and focused their work on triangular thinking rather than dyadic thinking.

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### **Implications of Triangulation for the Father-Son Conflict**

In the context of father-son conflict, there are two implications that can be drawn from the concept of family triangulation.

### **Triangulation as a Frozen Family Conflict**

While one function of triangulation is to let off steam, it also freezes conflict in place. We can say that triangulation provides stability in a relationship,



but it also impedes the resolution of conflicts. The child can be triangulated into the marital conflict, alleviating marital distress or deflecting attention from the distress by “taking on the symptom” (Chan 2009a, b). In this way, family attention is refocused on the problems of the child, which relieves the tensions of marital discord (Minuchin and Rosman 1978). Other than deviations in child behavior, the marital conflict is not resolved, but remains frozen.

Such frozen conflict will not be manifested in daily life because there will be pseudo-harmony within the parental subsystem. It is observed that the couple will resist any exploration of their marital relationship in the family session, but will instead persist in helping the child, or will sideline any exploration of the marital relationship to further complain against the child.

### **Triangulation as the Boundary Violation and Position Shift in the Family Structure**

In the triad of father–mother–son, Minuchin, the founder of structural family therapy, conceptualized a disengaged father–son dyad and an enmeshed mother–son dyad (Minuchin 1974). He found that the relationship between the parents was distant but not openly conflicting. Structural theorists talked about the “enmeshed” (closed) mother–child dyad, which attachment theorists conceptualized as the interaction of the child’s ambivalent attachment and the mother’s preoccupied attachment (Rothbaum et al. 2002).

In structural family therapy, the concept of triangulation not only addresses the question of how parental conflict affects the child, but also concludes that a close mother–son relationship keeps the father distant. The son is popularly seen as being triangulated into the marital conflict by acting as an ally to the mother and replacing the position of the father. In other words, the structural school of thought perceives that family members should have their own “positions” within the subsystem. This means that the father should have his own hierarchical position within the parental subsystem, and so should the other family members. If one of the family members

moves out of his original family position, this will result in the family being “out of hierarchy,” with the conflict between two parties being detoured.

To conclude, the concept of triangulation is fully addressed in the field of family therapy in the West. However, the concept of triangulation can also be found in Asian culture, and its implications for the father–son conflict are discussed.

### **Triangulation as a Cultural Concept in Asia**

Richard Charles (2001) reviewed eight empirical research articles published in the last decade or so in which Bowenian concepts were tested. On the other hand, Miller et al. (2004) also investigate whether Bowen theory is valid by reviewing the related studies in the last 15 years. The argument does not only exist in Western culture, but the same question about the empirical evidence of the Bowenian concept in Asian culture is also the other challenge to respond.

In fact, many Asian scholars have questioned the validity of Bowenian concepts such as differentiation, individuation, and triangulation in the Asian context, as they feel that what is considered to be a problem in Western culture is more of a norm in other cultures.

In relation to this, Chun and MacDermid (1997) studied the perceptions of 170 Korean adolescents on family differentiation, individuation, and self-esteem. To measure family differentiation, four dyadic interaction patterns were examined (parental, marital, father–adolescent, and mother–adolescent interaction). The results revealed significant relationships between adolescent individuation and differentiation in adolescent and same-sex parent–child pairs. For male adolescents, father–adolescent differentiation was the strongest predictor of individuation, while for female adolescents, it was mother–adolescent differentiation. For both male and female adolescents, individuation was negatively associated with self-esteem, which is a finding inconsistent with that of research done in the United States.

An ethnic differences study carried out by Gnoulati and Heine (2001), which explored the

theme of separation–individuation in late adolescence, represents a cultural contrast in comparison to the current thesis. By means of a demographic questionnaire and the Separation–Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA; Levine and Saintonge 1993), a sample of 125 male and 175 female undergraduates was studied. The SITA is a self-reported measure of adolescent separation–individuation which is conceptually linked to Mahler et al.'s (1975) early childhood separation–individuation phases. It contains 103 questions rated on a 5-point agree/disagree Likert-type scale, allows for the computation of a total score, and separates scores based on nine subscales. In their study, they found that Hispanics, Asians, and African-Americans are more concerned with engulfment fears and needs for nurturance than Caucasians. Moreover, Asians are more apt to shun dependent ties than Caucasians, and compared with the latter, African-Americans are more likely to anticipate rejection and are less apt to form close attachments with teachers. These conclusions indicate that cultural differences exist, and this is the reason why many Asian scholars question the validity of the differentiation concept in other cultures.

Rothbaum and colleagues (2002) reflected the view that the dynamics described in both family systems and attachment theories partly represent Western ways of thinking and Western patterns of relatedness. As an example of how such Western constructs may differ from those that prevail outside the West, an important criterion of sensitive caregiving in Japan is its fostering of a symbiotic relationship between mother and child in the boundary between them, which is blurred. By U.S. standards, Japanese mothers may appear overinvolved and intrusive, because they are much more likely than the U.S. mothers to anticipate infants' needs and to take proactive measures to minimize infants' distress, rather than delaying a response until the child gives a signal (Rothbaum et al. 2000; Vogel 1991).

Furthermore, dependence, the search for acceptance and commitment, and the desire for union in Japan are more common and are more

likely to be associated with competence (Fiske et al. 1998). Meanwhile, reliance on another, which is so often devalued in the West, is more often favored and is even prescribed in Japan (Azuma et al. 1981; Rothbaum, Pott et al. 2000).

Azuma et al. (1981) concluded:

Evidence from Japan suggests that extremely close ties between mother and child are perceived as adaptive, and are more common, and that children experience less adverse effects from such a relationship than children in the West. Moreover, in Japan, there is less emphasis on the importance of the exclusive spousal relationship, and less need for the mother and father to find time alone to rekindle romantic, intimate feelings and to resolve conflicts by openly communicating their differences.

While this point of view seems logical, it is contradicted by other studies that demonstrate that the concept of triangulation, which is different from the concepts of differentiation and individuation, exists in cultures other than that of the United States. For instance, Bell et al. (2001) conducted an important cross-cultural study about triangulation and adolescent development in the U.S. and Japan which further confirmed the relevance of the concept of triangulation in Asian countries. The sample in the study consists of adolescents from 99 U.S. families and 60 Japanese families. These families all participated in a structured home interview involving questionnaires and a projective family exercise, the Family Paper Sculpture (Bell 1986). The results supported the hypothesis that a couple's inability to handle differences and disagreements may lead to the triangulation of an adolescent who is either pushed out as a scapegoat or is pulled in as a coalition partner or mediator. In both the U.S. and Japanese samples, the triangulated sons were found to be used as scapegoats. The results also supported the second hypothesis that the triangulation of an adolescent can interfere with his or her personal development.

The above studies indicate that triangulation indeed exists in Asian countries, especially in Japan. The usual phenomenon is that when the couple cannot deal with their conflict or disagreement,

the adolescent child will be triangulated into the parental relationship in various ways. This goes beyond the cultural frame, but is a common phenomenon among families in Asian countries. Furthermore, this means that triangulation can be found both in the East and the West, with similarities found in clinical observations. Our next concern is whether the concept of family triangulation can be found in Chinese culture, and the focus is on classical opera stories, which reflect the accent of the culture.

**The Concept of Family Triangulation in Chinese Culture**

Although the Chinese culture does not focus on triangulation in the same sense, the idiom “three legs become stable” (三足鼎立) has been used for many years to convey the same idea, i.e., that a triad brings stability to the system. However, how the concept of triangulation is applied to Chinese families is not clearly indicated in the mainstream literature about counseling Chinese families. As stated earlier, Hall (1990) wrote that “culture is not always visible, and it hides most effectively from its own people”; it is thus worth investigating popular Chinese opera to capture the concept of family triangulation in Chinese culture.

Hsu and Tseng (1974) examined the father–mother–son relationship in stories in popular Chinese opera. They surveyed more than 100 classical Chinese operas, categorizing and analyzing the contents of the stories according to the themes of mother–son, father–son, mother–daughter, father–daughter, man–woman, husband–wife, sibling, and in-law relationships. Although the authors of the article did not categorize the father–mother–son relationship as a triad, all 12 of the father–son opera stories involved the mother as the key character in the father–son relationship, while the father figure did not necessarily feature in mother–son stories. The distribution of the themes is listed below.

From Table 24.1, it is seen that there are 12 stories about father–son relationships in the classical

**Table 24.1** Distribution of relationships in opera stories

Mother–son	16	Husband–wife	31
Father–son	12	Sibling	8
Mother–daughter	2	In-law	8
Father–daughter	7	Man–woman	27
Total	111		

Chinese operas studied. In contrast to mother–son relationships, the father–son relationship is described as positive in only a few stories. The Chinese father usually shows affection for his son only when the latter is a small child. When the son grows up, the father seldom openly expresses his feelings toward him. Hsu and Tseng further classified these stories into three themes: (1) triangular conflict among the father, son, and mother (seven stories); (2) sacrifice of a son to maintain other values (four stories); and (3) patricide in the form of killing a foster father (four stories).

The first theme of a triangular conflict among a father, mother, and son reflects its popularity in folk culture. The seven stories in the first theme describe the conflict between the father and the son with the son having grown up. The conflict is never described as an overt and intentional antagonism between the father and the son, but rather as the result of an incident in which they are antagonists without knowing that they are father and son, just like the Oedipus complex in the West. It is found that father and son could be proverbial strangers, which echoes what Ho (1987) and Shek (1994) said, but contradicts the traditional belief that glorifies the intimacy between father and son. The role of the mother in the father–son conflict is another notable feature. The mother is involved in such situations not as an instigator but rather as a mediator. The result of such incidental conflicts is the death of the son in one story, the death of the father in four stories, and negotiations between father and son in the other two stories.

In fact, father–son as strangers and intimate mother–son relationships are the key patterns in these stories. One of the examples is “Ding Shang’s Wild Goose Shooting (薛仁贵射子).” This story, which describes how father and son

are strangers and antagonists to each other, really reflects the dynamic of family triangulation. While the term “family triangulation” may not have been explicitly addressed, the nature of the concept is vividly demonstrated in opera stories popular in Chinese culture.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the myth of father–son conflict can be addressed using the Western concept of family triangulation developed in the field of family therapy. Evidence of the use of the triangular perspective in dealing with father–son conflict in Chinese families is also noted. The author himself, who has approximately 20 years of experience, observes that communication patterns that emphasize father–son communication, and the cognitive model that emphasizes the individual thoughts of father and son, respectively, may not be helpful. This means that any attempt to cultivate communication between father and son that neglects the role of the mother is likely to be in vain.

This chapter not only recalls the triangular perspective in the intervention of father–son conflict in the clinical context, but also lays the groundwork for an investigation of this hidden dimension (Hall 1990) of Chinese culture. Popular opera stories can act as an important source for an understanding of this aspect of Chinese culture.

The comparison between East and West has been addressed for several decades, and it is problematic to merely say that East and West are different from or similar to each other. The more valuable question is to what extent they are different from or similar to each other, and in what ways phenomena manifest themselves in different cultures.

Cultural studies have also contributed to this field over the past decade. This chapter has argued that changing perspectives on the way in which clinical process research should be carried out can be attributed to cultural understanding within the Chinese context. In addition to standard methodologies, such as surveys, participatory action research, and interviews, this chapter has demonstrated that an analysis of classical

literature, such as popular opera stories in Chinese culture, can also be used as a research methodology.

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Tess Tsang Mei-Wah

“Grandpa... Don’t go... Please, look at me... Take me with you. I don’t want to stay here.... Please look at me....Grandpa....” I woke up with a start, my face bathed in tears, gasping for breath. The dream lingered on. I chased after grandpa, desperately calling out to him and trying to grab hold of him, but he went farther and farther away. The sea was going to swallow me up. I gasped and gasped....

The same nightmare has haunted me for more than 20 years. Grandpa’s departure 13 years ago took the warmth out of my home.

During my childhood, owing to my parents’ sexist attitudes and the strict upbringing they gave me, backed up with freely administered corporal punishment, I never felt familial warmth. Only when I returned to our home village and met grandpa again did I feel love. His smile was tenderness itself. Each time I was scolded and beaten by my parents, I yearned to return to our home village and to the home where I really belonged. However, hard-hearted sickness took away my grandpa, my love, my home. This painful loss of “home” has troubled me for so many years. This pain is neither escapable nor dispersible.

How much can outsiders possibly know of our domestic lives? My heart aches whenever I think of this.

Home is supposed to be everybody’s cosy nest, but it often becomes a place where people find it difficult to voice their emotions. Every family has its “skeleton in the cupboard”, every family has its hidden story, but because “the skeleton in the cupboard must not be disclosed”, it is difficult to tell the story, however much one may want to. Every family’s story is different. Some are happy, some are sad, some are painful. Those happy and warm stories, of course, deserve to be enjoyed in retrospect. Those painful ones, however, are unbearable to recall. They are psychological deadlocks—insurmountable and inescapable. They are emotional stigmata. My strong attachment to family has prompted me to study family and young people’s views on the subject.

To young people in their 20s, “family” is an integral part of their life, because this family has been with them for more than 20 years. In childhood, everybody will listen to their parents and obey them absolutely and unconditionally. They see their parents as role models from whom they learn. But when they grow up and begin to mature psychologically and intellectually, they develop their own opinions and values. Unlike when they were small, they no longer obey their parents without question; they now have the ability and courage to express their own views and opinions to their parents, and even to say no to them. They begin to have

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doubts about their parents' ideas. "Why must I listen to my parents? What right do father and mother have to know all about my aspirations? Must parents' decisions be always right?" These questions are always present in young people's minds.

Listening to parents sometimes means denying one's own heartfelt wishes; but following one's heart sometimes means saying no to them. Thus as time goes by, an invisible wall grows between the young people and their parents, alienating them from each other. Young people gradually discover that their family is not without its faults and try to change it into the ideal family they have constructed in their minds. But the parents are still in charge, and young people, instead of fulfilling their desires, clash with them from time to time (Marcus 1995, p. 12). On the one hand, they love their parents and are grateful to them for raising them; on the other hand, they resent their parents for controlling and manipulating them, for failing to listen to their needs. This ambivalence is hidden in every family. This conflict is regrettable but unavoidable.

A happy home is a cosy nest, where one can talk about whatever is on one's mind and express oneself freely. It also provides an emotional haven. But sometimes there is a breakdown of communication within the family. If they turn on each other when things go wrong, home becomes a place of distress.

Every family has a history, be it happy or sad. What do young people, who have lived in their family for more than 20 years, have to say to their parents? How do they feel about this home of theirs? What are their expectations for their future ideal family? The young interviewees in this study all grew up in what others would regard as happy families. Nonetheless, every family has a dark side. What is the significance of family to them? What are their thoughts and feelings in respect of their own family? Can they assert themselves and free themselves from the control of their parents?

## Literature Review

### Family Is a Game

Laing (1971) defines family as relationships between spouses and between parents and children. In reality, family is a place without freedom, where children are deprived of freedom. The bond between husband and wife relies on the children. This is what Laing calls "a happy family game" or a "game of tennis". The child is the important bridge of communication between husband and wife as well the indispensable ball in the game of tennis. Without this ball, the game cannot go on. When the child is small, this game can go on smoothly because the child does not have the ability to oppose the parents. But what happens when the child grows up? When children get to 20 and have their unique views and ways of doing things, they may not blindly obey the parents any more. Without the child as a bridge or without the ball, how can the happy family game go on?

As they grow, children learn to disregard the parents' wishes and do things in their own way. But when the parents interfere with their thinking and decisions, resistance—or a seesaw struggle—begins. This kind of opposition usually has one of the three following results. Either the children win, in which case they can do what they want in their own way; or the children lose, in which case they have to act according to their parents' wishes; or neither side gets the better of the other, in which case what the children want to do has to be postponed, and the stalemate goes on. When young people are torn between what can be done and what cannot, inner turmoil ensues.

No matter how dissatisfied they are, young people will internalize the conflict or escape from reality and adapt as best they can. Look at the following example. The Wongs have four children. Today Mr. and Mrs. Wong have another quarrel and their voices get louder and louder. Hearing them, the eldest child, their daughter, sighs. She is concerned about her mother, but she

dare not say anything. She just walks into the kitchen and begins to wash the dishes, half of which have already been done by her mother. Then she goes on to clean the stove. After that, she feels better, as if doing something for the mother can reduce some of her suffering. The second child, who is a boy, is disturbed by the noise of the quarrel between his parents. Seeing that his father looks as if he is going to turn violent, he clenches his fist and dare not leave the living room, as he wants to be there to protect his mother. The third child, also a boy, upon returning home, notices his older brother glaring at the parents and his older sister doing chores in the kitchen. Annoyed, he escapes into his own room, closes the door, puts on some music, and forces himself to study. The fourth child also returns home, only to discover that his parents are having another row and nobody seems to notice his presence. He finds it hard to stay at home like this and so sneaks out in search of entertainment (Bradshaw 1988, p. 81).

From this example it can be seen that the eldest child makes herself feel better by way of displacement. Since she cannot prevent her parents from quarrelling with each other, she can only cope with the situation by helping her mother with domestic chores. The second child's behaviour is difficult to predict. He may get involved in the dispute between his parents. When his parents are quarrelling, he may demand that they stop. Or he may yell at his father, "Don't do this to mum. She's already upset enough!" The second child's intervention may succeed in stopping the parents' quarrel but he may also get himself into trouble and become a scapegoat for his parents.

The third and the fourth children do not wish to get involved. Instead, they choose to leave the scene and turn a blind eye to it. Their behaviour fits in with Berger's (1986) concept of detachment and Laing's (1971) of scotomization.

In addition, to follow the happy-family scenario, I am unhappy, but I deny that I am unhappy, and I will not admit to myself or to others that I am denying anything. They must do as I do. I will collude with them to deny these things, and they must also collude with me (Laing 1971, p. 89). Precisely because everybody is "endeavouring"

to maintain a happy family, every family member will try to forget unhappy things in the family by different means, and these means are what Laing and Freud call defence mechanisms. Family members hide unhappiness in the mind so that every family looks happy.

## Family Power

Lips (1994, p. 349) thinks not only that the children and the mother will join forces, but also that family power comes from alliances and coalitions. Because of the societal concept of "Men outside, women inside", the power of the father is visible power, which chiefly comes from his economic resources. In contrast, the mother's status seems insignificant, thus creating an imbalance of power within the family. However, since the children spend more time in their mother's company than in their father's, they are witnesses to the mother's sacrifice and love. So in terms of both emotion and action, they are positively biased towards the mother; as a result they have a better relationship with the mother than with the father. This intimate relationship with her children gives the mother a kind of invisible power.

Extrapolating from this situation, when the parents quarrel, the children will side with the mother against the father. The alliance between the children and the mother increases the children's bargaining power with the father, something outside the expectations of both mother and father.

In the essay "Thinking about Fathers", Ruddick (1992) points out that, as fathers have to go out to work and are often absent from home, they cater only for the material needs of the family and seldom care for the children emotionally. They are, so to speak, emotionally absent. So the father is relatively alienated from the children. Sometimes the father's presence is not necessarily a good thing, because the father's love may also become a kind of burden which limits their freedom. The children think that the father is exercising his power, forcing them to take "orders" from him. This makes them feel stifled, causing them to struggle to free themselves from the father's bonds. However, do the

children have the courage to break free of the “family shackles” imposed by the father?

## Family Is a Cycle

Lee Wai-yung (2003) thinks that the family has its own life cycle. There is a way to discipline children and another to discipline adolescents. When the children are grown up, they will gradually “discipline” the parents in their turn. The magician, time, will eventually reverse the roles of the two generations. Nonetheless, in practice this family life cycle often goes wrong and leads to conflict and trauma between the two generations.

From the point of view of the parents, they have already accumulated a great many life experiences, and they are eager to teach all of them to their children in order to save them a great deal of trouble. Thus the parents are especially eager to correct the children’s mistakes and errors. But the children’s psychology is just the opposite. They only want to try things for themselves and will not listen to advice. As a result, a generation gap develops between parents and children.

Lee Wai-yung thinks that, while many Chinese mothers lavish care on their children, it does not occur to them that the children, far from needing a protective mother, are more in need of a mother who is willing to let go. If the mother will not let go, the children cannot venture far. Children who cannot venture far do not have the ability to cope with the pressures of the external world. Once frustrated, they will escape back to the bosom of their parents. “The hand which the child desperately tries to fling off is also the hand the child cannot avoid holding tight” (Lee Wai-yung 2003, p. 45).

Liv Ullmann, who starred in films by the famous Swedish director, Ingmar Bergman, has starred in a movie entitled *Sofie*. The misfortune of Sofie comes from her inability to free herself of her family’s expectations. Her regret is that she only has expectations that can never be fulfilled. Her son is her only solace and hope. But when the son wants to leave home, she calmly lets go. Upon departure, her son asks,

“Mum, will you be lonely?” Sophie says, “I will be lonely, but I don’t want my love to be your prison” (Lee Wai-yung 2003, p. 46). The path that the younger generation wants to take is unfamiliar to the older generation. But Lee Wai-yung thinks that the parents have to allow the children to be treated as adults and to be held accountable for their deeds. Otherwise, the younger generation will never know how to account for themselves.

“Every one of us comes from a family and lives in a family”. To a group of young people in their 20s, what is the significance of family? How do they view their “happy family”? This chapter will try to comprehend the most real and yet unknown side of their families.

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## Research Methods

As children grow up, they are reluctant to talk to other people about their own family. Even if they are secretly unhappy, they are accustomed to hiding everything from others. Even though they want to share it, they do not know where to begin and how to express it verbally. Thus, I choose the medium of photography as a data-gathering technique, hoping that the interviewees will express what they think about their family by way of photos.

Berger (1972, p. 1) says, “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak”. “But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled” (Berger 1972, p. 7). Words are not always able to express what we see. Hine (see Sontag 1977, p. 185) also says that if I could say in words what I feel in the mind, I would not have to pick up my camera. From that it can be seen that photography is an alternative way of expressing one’s feelings and emotions. Moreover, images or photos can more directly communicate messages and impress people (Gierstbery and Oosterbaan 2002, p. 7).

A photo contains the message that the photographer wants to tell other people. It has its own meaning and content. For example, it can reflect time, character, location, and activity. A simple photo may be permeated with many secret messages. A photo is not only a verbal image but an interpretation of reality. A picture paints a thousand words.

Many sociological studies rely only on interview data for their analysis. With the aid of photos, however, the content of an interview can be made more real. Photos can provide evidence. When we hear of a certain matter but doubt its authenticity, we can confirm the matter once we see a relevant photo. Photography is a more direct, specific, and convincing method of expression (Sontag 1977, p. 5).

My interviewees may find it difficult to elaborate on the three topics, “What is Family?” “My Family”, and “The Ideal Home”. It is very difficult to give verbal expression to abstract concepts and complicated feelings. Photography can make up for the inadequacies of an interview. It projects, through images, feelings the interviewees find it hard to put into words. A photograph thus communicates

directly with the viewer. Apart from attracting attention, it also deeply impresses. From the photos we can see the families of the interviewees, as well as the feelings they manifest in the photos. Each photo represents a story and a recollection. As words and photos complement each other, the interviewees’ views about their families are thereby revealed.

Before being interviewed, my interviewees took photos under the three headings, “What is Family?” “My Family”, and “The Ideal Home”. They can freely and unrestrictedly choose any subjects to exemplify these three topics. After the pictures were taken, I invited the interviewees to explain the significance of every photo and listened to what they revealed about their families.

My analysis is divided into topic analysis and case analysis. Topic analysis will be done in accordance with the above headings. And case analysis will interpret, with the interviewee, the pictures taken, in order to find out their views and feelings about family.

In my study, I interviewed 13 young people (seven women and six men) in their early 20s. Their personal data are as follows:

Number	Name	Gender	Age	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Seniority among siblings
1	Ada	Female	23	Occupational Safety and Health Council tutor	Housewife	One older brother
2	Mandy	Female	23	Construction worker	Clerk	One younger brother
3	Betty	Female	22	Construction worker	Cleaning worker	One younger brother
4	Coral	Female	22	Cook	Housewife	One older sister and three younger sisters
5	Ella	Female	22	Businesswoman	Housewife	Only child
6	Fiona	Female	23	Mass Transit Railway station chief	Housewife	One younger brother and one younger sister
7	Joan	Female	23	Police officer	Housewife	One younger sister
8	Jeff	Male	22	Businessman	Civil servant	One older sister
9	John	Male	23	Kowloon Motor Bus Company technician	Housewife	Two younger brothers
10	Tony	Male	22	Engineer	Housewife	One younger brother
11	Peter	Male	22	Construction worker	Cleaning worker	One older sister
12	David	Male	23	Coach driver	Housewife	Two older sisters
13	Chris	Male	23	Construction worker	Salesman	One older brother



## Analysis of Interview Data

The following will be divided into topic analysis and case analysis. In the topic analysis, I will seek to make interpretations and draw certain conclusions about what young people think about family. In the case analysis, I specifically address two most difficult family stories in order that we can understand some unknown aspects of family.

### Topic Analysis

#### What Is Family?

##### Home Is a Place That Feels Warm and Comfortable

Peter has taken a picture of a boundless blue sky (Photo 25.1):

I think of home as a comfortable place. First, physical comfort, clothing, food, shelter and transportation—the basic needs—have to be satisfied. If you have to live under a flyover and eat meals not suitable for human beings, how can you live comfortably? Moreover, home has to be quiet so that you will feel mentally and spiritually comfortable. I think no one would like their home to be noisy. I took this photo in Tai Mei Tuk. I was lying on my back gazing at the blue sky, feeling very comfortable. I think home should feel comfortable.

In fact, most young people describe home in these terms. To them, home is a place that feels

warm, comfortable, and stress-free. In young people's hearts, a tranquil home is the source of their spiritual solace and support. Though they may be exposed to wind and rain outside, they will feel very comfortable once they get home.

##### Home Is a Sheltered Place, a Place of Rest

In explaining the photo (Photo 25.2), Betty said:

Home is very important to everybody, because returning home means entering a safety net, a sheltered place, where you cannot be harmed by people outside. Home will protect you, lighten your burden, and shelter you from wind and rain, so that you may rest. It is as important as the umbrella you need when it is raining. When it is raining, you will get soaked through without an umbrella. Without our home, we will be all at sea.

Some young people think in terms of the basic functions of home. Home is our cosy nest, our material shelter. To them, a sheltered place where they can rest is more important than anything. To be without their home or family means to be without a refuge and completely disorientated. So family is not only their nest but also their destination.

##### Family Is the Relationship with Family Members

As the saying goes, "Blood is thicker than water". The Chinese like to use this phrase to refer to the kindred bond between parents and children. Their



**Photo 25.1** What is family? (Peter)

**Photo 25.2** What is family?  
(Betty)



**Photo 25.3** What is family?  
(Tony)



relationship is very close and makes them inseparable. Precisely because of this, the state of family relationships will affect the individual's emotions and performance.

In explaining the photo (Photo 25.3), Tony said:

Home is a place which affects my emotions. If home is happy, it will certainly help my studies and work. I would describe home as an LP player. The gramophone record itself is classical and enduring. It retains the quality of the original sound. Similarly, every family member is like a musical instrument. For example, father is a piano,

mother is a violin. Everyone has their place in which they play different instruments. If everybody is in concert with everybody else, that is, relations among the family members are good, and the family is harmonious, the music will be pleasing to the ear. Otherwise, it will be discordant.

Tony thought that every family member is like a musical instrument. Father is a piano, mother is a violin. Everybody has their place. Young people nowadays think that family members have to cooperate in the division of labour, in order to maintain the harmony and integrity of the family. And “as a matter of course” they assign specific

responsibilities to family members. For example, all the interviewed young people said “father is responsible for earning money”, “mother is responsible for housework”, and “we have to do well at our studies and work”. Every member has a responsibility, which is already fixed and unchangeable. These concepts are based on long-term socialization, which has fixed the roles of men and women. Under the insidious influence of Chinese society and family, it is very difficult for young people to break the mould of this social framework, whether outside (in society) or inside (in their own attitudes), despite the influence of Western ideas such as equality between the sexes.

### My Family

#### Home Is a Harmonious and Warm Place

Ella describes her family as a school of carp swimming in a pond (Photo 25.4):

This school of carp swim happily in the water. But when you look at them carefully, you will find that they are scattered about instead of together. I think my family is very happy, just like fish enjoying swimming in water. But sometimes family members cannot stay together because one of them has to take a business trip, just as fish sometimes cannot stay together because they have to look for food outside. But they will eventually come together. That is why I treasure the time spent with my family very much.

Ella's father is a businessman, mother a housewife. Ella is the only child of the family. Her father is often absent from home, like the “absent father” in Ruddick's (1992) discourse. Because father is not often at home with his family, many people would not expect their relationship with him to be very close. But this is not the case. On the contrary, Ella understands the demanding nature of her father's work and this makes her value all the more the time they spend together. When she mentions how their family dine together when her father returns from a business trip, she smiles in a contented way, showing the joy brought her by her family.

#### Home Is Irreplaceable

Mandy thinks that home is unique to its members and exclusive of strangers:

Whenever I see this iron gate (Photo 25.5), I know I am home. One has only one home, and only insiders have the key to it. The key belongs to members only. My mother has said, “This family will always welcome you. Although my family members are sometimes very interfering, I feel thoroughly uneasy when they are not around. So better to be annoyed by them than not...”

Fiona thought likewise:

I think family is something unchangeable. It was assigned to you when you were born. You can choose your friends, and you can drop them if you



**Photo 25.4** My family  
(Ella)



**Photo 25.5** My family (Mandy)

cannot get along with each other. The choice is in your hands. But I cannot choose my family. Also, I think our being one family is a result of karmic affinity. They will always back you up and provide you with a haven.

Both Mandy and Fiona thought that family is unique and that the status of family members is irreplaceable. The most unique characteristic of home is that it “will always welcome you” and “will always back you up”. Home is different from a hotel, as home is not accessible to just anybody; only members have the key. The importance of family members is shown by the fact that when they are not around, one will “feel thoroughly uneasy”. Precisely because family is something you are born into, an unalterable fact, their attitude towards it tends to be tolerant. They do not fight over many things with their family, because they see a kind of karma in their kinship, and they should treasure it.

### Family Is Forever Changing

Family changes with time, instead of remaining the same forever. In explaining the photo (Photo 25.6), Tony said:



**Photo 25.6** My family (Tony)

I would describe my family as a cup of coffee. When I was very small, my family went through a hard time, which was like black coffee—very, very bitter. Each and every day of our lives was very bitter. Then the situation improved, and the income of the family stabilized and it became richer, just like cappuccino—fragrant and smooth. Home began to be a comfortable place. Now the situation is even better, and the family burden is light, just like caramel coffee—rather sweet.

Tony’s father is an engineer, his mother a housewife. When Tony was very small, they lived in a wooden hut. At that time, his father’s income was small and unstable. The family had to be very frugal and its distressing situation made a deep impression on Tony. As he said, “The family was like black coffee—unspeakably bitter”.

When his father acquired a higher position, their home became a fragrant and sweet place where he enjoyed himself, just like cappuccino and caramel coffee. From that it can be seen that the family has been able to change from stage to stage, from past bitterness to present sweetness. Accordingly, Tony’s mood has changed from initial abrasiveness to present mildness. Thus, the child’s feelings about family will change with the situation of the family.

### Home Is Where Quarrels Arise Out of Trivial Matters

Betty described the kitchen of her home as the source of all disputes:

Don’t think that this is an ordinary kitchen (Photo 25.7). All family disputes start here—for example,





**Photo 25.7** My family (Betty)

who is to wash the dishes, who is to wash the clothes, who is to dry them, who is to collect them? My family often argue heatedly over such trivial matters. Moreover, we have dinner in the kitchen. So most family communication takes place in the kitchen. Sometimes my younger brother complains that the dishes cooked by mother don't taste nice and a quarrel ensues. How annoying...

Many families quarrel for trivial reasons, be it over division of housework or clashing lifestyles, which are all potential topics for "communication" in the family. Take Betty's family for example. The arguments and power struggles between husband and wife and between the two generations always take place in the kitchen. The family members often quarrel over the issue of division of housework. The children play an important role. In solving family disputes, they adopt an active rather than a passive attitude. It is found in my interviews that when a minor dispute occurs in the family, the young people will take the initiative in solving the problem. For example, when a dispute takes place in the family over the issue of doing the washing-up, they

will take the initiative in doing the dishes in order to prevent their family members from perpetuating the dispute.

### **Family Is a Place Where Power Is Unevenly Balanced**

Betty thinks that father's power at home is so great as to make mother feel wronged:

My father is a very traditional man, who thinks that his wife and children all have to listen to him. My mother has a job and she does contribute her wages to the family. But father does not take her contribution seriously at all, because he thinks that only he is the economic provider of the family, that mother's income counts for nothing. I remember that during one of their quarrels, father yelled at mother, "I am talking to you. You shut up... You're just a woman,—what do you know?..." Then mother went to her room weeping. At the time, I was very angry, feeling that father was being too high-handed. I use this photo of Mr. and Mrs. Smith (Photo 25.8), because I think the couple seems to be engaged in a decisive battle. But the situation of my family is Mr. Smith bullying Mrs. Smith rather than an equal battle...

According to Parsons and Bales (1955), in the family, the father plays an instrumental role while the mother plays an expressive role maintaining emotional ties among the members of the family. Because the father's functions are more visible, such as earning the wages to pay for the family's expenses, and the mother's functions are more invisible, such as maintaining emotional ties among the family members, the breadwinner naturally becomes the most powerful person in the family.

Moreover, China is a traditional, patriarchal society and the father's power at home is indisputable, so husband and wife are not equal. Take Betty's family again. Her father is a construction worker, who often fails to make ends meet. As a result, her mother has to work as a cleaner in order to help with the family's expenses. But in her father's eyes, women's paid work is trivial; only he is the economic support of the family, and his wife has to listen to him. Knowing that her mother leads a hard life having to go out to work as well as to do housework, Betty thinks this is very unfair, but she does not think she can change this situation.



**Photo 25.8** My family  
(Betty)



Betty dare not tell her father about her concerns, but she is emotionally and practically biased towards her mother. For example, she listens to her mother's woes and helps her with the housework. These may be her mother's "accidental gains".

### The Ideal Home

Under the heading, The Ideal Home, the young people expressed their expectations for their future family, their criticisms of their home as it is now, or the changes they would like to see introduced into their present home. Their ideal homes all have the following characteristics:

### Hopefully Better-off Materially

Betty said:

Maybe because my family is relatively poor, many things cannot be done. My parents work very hard but do not earn much. It makes me very sad to witness their situation. So I have a dream, which is that my family will earn more money, then all of us can live in a spacious apartment and the quality of our lives will improve. I mean the kind of apartment as shown in the photo (Photo 25.9). Then father and mother can enjoy themselves...

Like Betty, some interviewees hoped that their lives will improve. They did not loathe their present lifestyle; they just wanted to improve the

well-being of their family with their own hands. Young people with this kind of material need usually come from a working-class family. They are all affected by family circumstances in real life. Because their family now is not well-off, they expect their future family to be better off in order to make up for the inadequacy of the current home.

### Hopefully the Family Can Be More Harmonious, Happy, and Mutually Supportive

Mandy said:

This scene of the older couple strolling hand in hand in the park is very tender (Photo 25.10). I hope that my family can always support each other. Although there is bound to be conflict, it will still be perfect if relationships can be maintained properly. I think, after all, we all need partners in life. It's not just for a sense of security, it's because people cannot live alone. You need someone to give you a hand. And your family members will always support you...

Fiona said:

The people in the picture are my grandma and niece (Photo 25.11). Their smiles are confident and happy. They are two very different persons, one old and one young, and the family feels complete. I hope that the whole family can live together harmoniously, peacefully solving any problem.

**Photo 25.9** The ideal home (Betty)



**Photo 25.10** The ideal home (Mandy)



### The Desire to Change the Current Situation in the Family

Quite a few interviewees mentioned the issue of excessive paternal power which leaves them and their mother no right to influence decisions at home. They all thought that the situation should be improved.

Tony said, “My father’s power is so great that all the decisions are made by him while all the

housework is done by mother. I hope to be able to help my wife with the housework in the future, and I hope she will feel able to voice her own views”.

Fiona said, “I hope that in the future, I will be on the same level as my husband—neither party will have too much power”.

As a result of excessive patriarchal power, there is a wall between the father and the mother or children. The children dare not raise issues

**Photo 25.11** The ideal home (Fiona)



with the father and sometimes even have to take “orders” from him. The children find the situation hard to bear and feel that there is a need for change, but in reality they do not dare to challenge the father, for this may have unpredictable consequences.

So they can only hope that in the future when they become parents, they will be able to create a different family, a more equal family, in which every member has the right to voice their opinion.

In everybody’s imagination there is a domestic utopia, which may vary according to the current situation of their family. Each of the pictures, each of the sentences, reveals their aspirations for the family, whether it be integrity and mutual supportiveness or better communication and mutual understanding among the family members. It is not easy to give expression to one’s aspirations. Apart from needing the courage to admit to the inadequacy of the family in its present state, it is also necessary to bear various kinds of emotional pressure. Behind every ideal there is a story. In what kind of mood do the young people express their aspirations? Although there is dissatisfaction among the family members, young people still want the whole family to stick together. In young people’s minds, family really occupies an irreplaceable position.

## Case Analysis

### Jeff

Jeff lives with his parents and older sister. His father is a businessman, his mother a civil servant. His older sister seldom comes home, and his mother is also often out at work. The father and the son are therefore “partners” in daily life. Now, let us take a look at what Jeff thinks about family in terms of the three topics, “What is Family?”, “My Family”, and “The Ideal Home”.

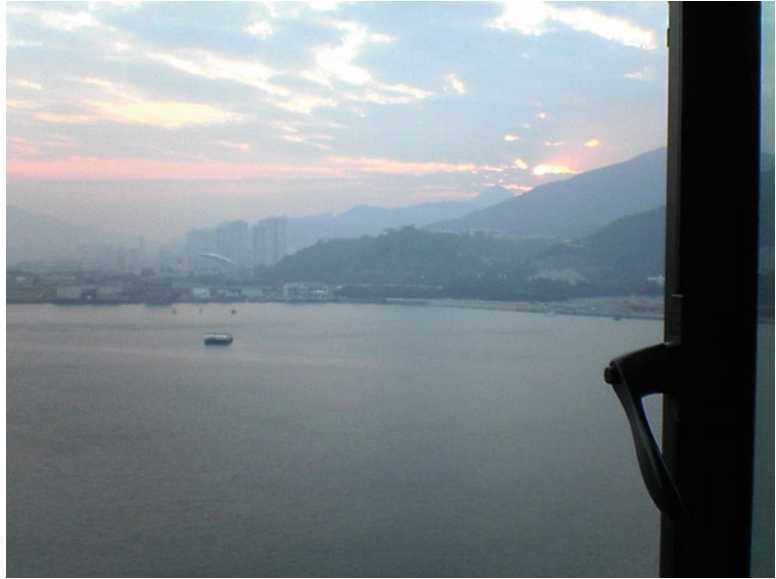
### “What Is Family?”

Jeff represented family with a view of the sky through the window (Photo 25.12). He said, “A family consists of husband and wife and children. It is also a place of rest away from work. It is where you can speak your mind, communicate and receive support, where your parents teach you how to be”. From that it can be seen that to Jeff, family is a comfortable place, just like the sky in the picture, where one can learn “how to be” from the parents.

### “My Family”

Jeff represents “my family” with a picture of his father’s back (Photo 25.13). “Father’s control of me is very strict. During my childhood he was actually quite lenient. Now I am grown up, he is

**Photo 25.12** What is family  
(Jeff)



**Photo 25.13** My family  
(Jeff)



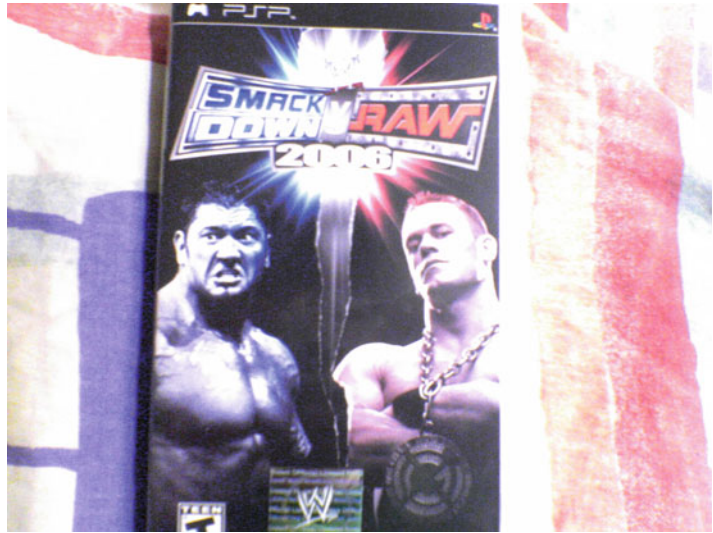
becoming stricter and stricter. For example, no dating. Even my going out at night is frowned on by him.... Father is someone who can be very disagreeable should you cross him. His reasoning is: 'You can't possibly convince me. I'm right and you have to listen to me.' Very stressful...".

Because of his father's domineering personality, Jeff dare not look him in the face. So he can only photograph him from behind. He described his father's back as awe-inspiring too. Jeff thought that his family is an extremely patriarchal place,

where the father imposes his views on the son. Because the mother is often absent from home, the father plays the instrumental and the expressive roles at the same time. The frequent absences of the mother have led to changes in the father's role. Jeff thought that his father has really given him a lot of advice concerning his prospects, but very little emotional support. He feels that his father is always being critical and seldom supports or praises him. He had even chosen a future wife for Jeff. Jeff had thought of escaping from



**Photo 25.14** My family  
(Jeff)



his father's clutches, but he dare not do so. He said, "I very much want to move out, but I daren't. Because I foresee the loss of many benefits, I try to maintain a superficial relationship. (Question: 'What kind of benefits?') For example, material things, father's company, the factory.... So I dare not break with father; I am afraid that I will lose everything..."

Jeff's father is a businessman with his own factory in mainland China. Jeff will probably inherit the business. In addition, most things at home are provided by his father. So Jeff expects his father to support him financially when he leaves home. It can thus be seen that their relationship is built upon economics and materialism. Precisely because of this, Jeff is also somewhat "utilitarian". He said, "Father and mother are two huge interest groups. Sometimes I support my father against my mother, sometimes vice versa, depending on which choice will benefit me most. But mostly I support father against mother". In his case is found the rare father-child dyad. But the father-child dyad is based on self-interest rather than affectionate intimacy. If some day Jeff can somehow free himself of the ties of material self-interest, he will probably leave this family.

In Jeff's eyes, father is family. On the one hand, he provides material benefits; on the other, he controls the son. A paradoxical situation has thus arisen—the son has ambivalent feelings

towards his family. He loves the material comforts of the family home, but hates being under his father's control.

Jeff said, "I want to train myself up to be as strong as the wrestler in the picture (Photo 25.14), so that I can stand up to my father. Actually, when I was sitting for the A Level Exam, I did fight my father and had a cold war with him. But eventually I was the loser. So I am always fancying I can beat him. But it is just daydreaming..."

Jeff identified the two wrestlers in the photo as him and his father, both seeming ready for the fight. From Jeff's thoughts of "knocking out" his father it can be seen that the father-son relationship is very tense and always in a state of imminent duel. In real life, he wants to resist but dare not. He tried to resist but failed. He can only go on letting himself be controlled and manipulated by his father, persist in his fantasies and hope that eventually he will be able to overthrow him. Interestingly, even under such strict monitoring, Jeff is still sometimes able to do things he likes in secret, for example, joining a fan club. On the surface, he conforms to his father's wishes; on the quiet he does what he likes without anybody knowing.

### The Ideal Home

When talking about the ideal home, Jeff airs his discontents and his criticisms of his family. He said, "In the photo (Photo 25.15), there is a



**Photo 25.15** The ideal home (Jeff)



**Photo 25.16** The ideal home (Jeff)



lock on the door to my room. Although I have a room of my own, I don't have any personal space, because father and mother won't allow me to lock the door. They like to barge in whenever they like, and so the door can't be locked". By drawing attention to the lock he reveals his discontents but also what he hopes for—that he will win control of the lock eventually. He hopes to keep a little space for himself.

Jeff hopes his father can let go (Photo 25.16) and allow him to explore the world. He said, "I hope my parents will let go of me and allow me

to develop freely. I don't approve of parents organizing their children's lives, because the resulting pressure will be too high. I'd rather have better communication with my parents than material wealth". Here again there is a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, Jeff wants his parents to let go; on the other hand, he dare not demand complete freedom from his parents because he depends on his father to organize his life. Once father lets go, Jeff is worried that he will feel insecure and lose his bearings. As Lee Wai-yung says, "The hand that the child desperately tries to break

free of is also the hand it cannot but hold tight". From this it can be seen that Jeff's thoughts are very ambivalent and confused. A boy controlled by his father wants to break free of the father's manipulation, but often submits to authority. As Berger says (1986), society (family) is a prison which deprives people of freedom. Because the son's life has for so long been directed by his father, he is afraid of losing his bearings once he is free, though he craves freedom.

To him, family is a shackle. Though he would like to break out of it, he is incapable and he can only survive by maintaining the status quo.

### Carol

Carol lives with her parents. She is the second of five children. Her father is a chef and her mother a housewife. As there are so many people at home and she witnessed her mother's attempted suicide during her childhood, she has special views on the topics, "What is Family?", "My Family" and "The Ideal Home".

### What Is Family?

Carol represents family with a broken ceramic tile (Photo 25.17): "Family concerns personal relationships. People's feelings in the family are most sensitive. Everybody keeps their weakest side at home. An inadvertently offensive remark from a friend may not have a lasting impact, but

it will be very serious if it is uttered by a family member. Once there is a crack in the familial relationship, it will be like a cracked ceramic tile. You may patch it up with adhesive tape but the crack will still be there..." To Carol, her family is a cracked tile, and the familial bond is very fragile. If it is not maintained properly, irreparable cracks will appear.

For instance, suppose there is a taboo subject in the family. If one of the members breaks the rule, refers to it, and says something that hurts another family member, it will become an unhealed wound in the heart of the family, like a cracked tile, repaired, but never the same.

### My Family

In the photo (Photo 25.18), there is a glass bead in the palm of a hand. She said, "The hand represents my parents and the glass bead represents me. To a certain extent, I think I am a pearl in the palm of my parents' hands. My parents love their children, but because there are so many children in the family, they show favouritism and neglect my development and feelings". As there are so many children in the family, parental love is diluted and Carol feels left out. Consequently she keeps a lot of things to herself and cannot voice them. She described herself as very sensitive, just like a glass bead, which will break into pieces as soon as it falls to the floor.



**Photo 25.17** What is family  
(Carol)

**Photo 25.18** My family  
(Carol)



**Photo 25.19** My family  
(Carol)



Carol described home as a place with a lot of “grooves” (Photo 25.19). She has to keep to her groove, otherwise collisions will occur and she may easily break. She said, “Sometimes I have to do a lot of things for the sake of my relationship with my family. For example, my family places a premium on academic results. Ever since my childhood, my parents have been telling me that academic success is very important. As a consequence, I am very worried that my academic results will be no good and then I will be beaten.

So I have to work hard all the time, but the pressure is great. I don’t see the point of studying.”

The “grooves” at home are like norms in society, which people have to follow and comply with (Photo 25.20). These norms deprive Carol of her freedom. She indicated that because she spends all her time studying, she has lost a lot of things, such as friendship. She does not know how to communicate with other people or how to express herself. She frankly admitted that she feels suffocated. But now she thinks that she has

**Photo 25.20** My family  
(Carol)



accepted the need to study hard as part of her own outlook. This fits in with Berger's view (1986) that people will gradually internalize society's expectations of themselves, and Laing's (1971) concept that people may introject others' expectations and take them for granted.

Initially it was her parents who expected her to study hard, but now she expects herself to study hard, because she thinks she should do so. Her behaviour is on her own initiative rather than at her parents' behest. There is a powerful contrast in her doing voluntarily now what she was compelled to do initially.

Carol's depression is to a great extent derived from witnessing her mother's suicide attempt during her childhood. As she recollected, "One night I heard noises in the living room, so I jumped out of bed to see what happened, only to find father calling the police. It turned out that mother had tried to hang herself in her room. It's the first time I had seen mother's eyes swollen from crying and she would not listen to father...".

Due to the pressure of her parents' expectations and the dark shadow of her mother's attempted suicide, Carol very much wants to break out of the family. She wants her parents to let go of her, and she wants to break free of the shadow of her mother's attempted suicide. Although she knows that she may get hurt as a

consequence (the glass bead may break), she will not regret it. Witnessing her mother's suicide attempt has made her turn in on herself even more. She dare not communicate with her family and there is a distance between them. She says that she never laughs or cries. She is afraid to see her parents quarrel because she is worried that her mother may kill herself again. So whenever her parents quarrel with each other, she mediates between them as a counsellor, keen on maintaining harmony and peace at home. Obviously Carol has become the victim of the event in which her mother tried to commit suicide after quarrelling with her father. She has never been able to walk out of this shadow. Laing's "game of tennis" and the "happy family game" have something to offer here: the good relationship between the parents depends on Carol's efforts. Without her, the parents' quarrels may never end and the mother may want to die again.

### The Ideal Home

Carol said, "It is a sea of cloud. I wish to be easy, carefree and myself. The sea of clouds represents my relationship with my family. I think a certain distance should be maintained. If we are too close, there will be no personal space". From the photo (Photo 25.21), it can be sensed that Carol's ideal home is a place of release and relief.



**Photo 25.21** The ideal home (Carol)



From Carol's photos and interview, we can see that home is a confining place, which restricts her both physically and psychologically. She does not like quarrels between her parents; she does not want to be too close to her family; she wishes to break out of the dark shadow and build a new life for herself.

## Conclusion

Upon finishing this chapter, I feel somewhat exhausted mentally. In order to understand family as seen through the eyes of young people, I have dug up and analyzed a series of painful family stories. I do not like to uncover other families' secrets, because it amounts to making those people re-live their pain. It is easy to make them recall happy things, but hard to make them recall pain and sorrow. I became a tormentor of other people and of myself. When I listen to other people's family stories, I encounter someone who has had experiences similar to mine, and who is similarly fearful and weak. Each time I interviewed those people, I recalled my own family story, which I thought I had forgotten. I admire them, sympathize with them and understand them. Family is really a place difficult to talk about and to face.

Precisely because family is something difficult to talk about orally, I have tried to enable the young people to describe their family in other ways. A picture is more telling than thousands of words. It not only shows the real side of society but also provides an insight into the feelings of the photographer. Sociology seldom adopts the visual approach as a research tool. Both qualitative and quantitative studies mostly rely on interviews to obtain data for analysis. Although data can reflect some social phenomena, their significance may be difficult to comprehend for less educated people or people who do not know how to articulate themselves. In contrast, photos are not limited by knowledge and education. Even less educated people have something personal to say when seeing a photo. Of course, different people interpret photography differently. The researcher may not be able to understand the original intention of the photographer. Thus, we have to allow the photographer to explain his or her photos by interviewing him or her.

It has been said that photos are so influenced by the photographer's self-consciousness and personal feelings that they are unable to depict the whole truth. I cannot agree. Is something not implied when many people express the same concept with similar photos? For instance, in this study, many young people represent family by way



of sky. They think and hope that family is a cosy and carefree place just like the sky. In this situation, their self-consciousness is equal to collective consciousness. What the photos reflect is not just personal aspirations but collective criticism of society.

It is not easy for me to analyze a photo from the sociological perspective. Apart from knowing the significance of the photo, it is also necessary to analyze its relevance to sociology. What sociological concepts do these photos embody? For example, in the case of Jeff, one of his photos uses two wrestlers to represent "my family". Students of psychology may say, "Jeff is someone under heavy psychological stress; he is in a long-term troubled state of mind". On the other hand, I not only have to perceive from the photo that Jeff is a stressed man, but I also have to obtain some sense of the nature of his relationship with his father. As it turns out, the relationship is always antagonistic and confrontational. Jeff plays the role of a weakling, who very much wants to free himself from his father's authority. What is unique about sociology is that it probes the complexities of a superficial straightforward concept in order to expose certain societal problems. To organize, analyze, and express the contents of the photos and interviews from a sociological perspective is a most challenging and interesting thing.

This study has interviewed 13 young people and collected 13 different stories from 13 different families. Every interviewee interprets the family in their own individual way, through photos. This process leads to both similar and dissimilar ways of thinking about family. For example, "An Iron Gate" expresses the closeness of family; "LP Player" emphasizes that family members have to accept a fair division of labour in order to maintain the harmony and integrity of the family; "Cup of Coffee" shows that the growth of children and their feelings towards the family may change with changes in the family; "The Back of Father" exposes the father's authority, etc. Different photos show the uniqueness and diversity of family.

However, from the 13 different stories, we can infer a common theme, that is, that home is a place full of contradictions and paradoxes. The photos reflect the complicated and ambivalent feelings of

the young people towards their family. Although some interviewees indicate that home is a harmonious and warm place, I discern more stories of the interviewee's resistance to the family. In a significantly patriarchal family, how the children deal with the father, how they shun the father's pressure, and how they unite with the mother against the father all reflect the dramatic side of the family. But because "the skeleton in the cupboard must not be disclosed", these stories are oftentimes simply hidden in the minds of the young people as just that, the "skeleton in the cupboard".

"Every family has a skeleton in the cupboards", but according to the spirit of sociology, the more something is deliberately concealed, the more it needs to be exposed. Thus, I have scrutinized other people's "family stories" and read them aloud. The interviewees have both positive and negative views about family, but this study lays emphasis on the negative part, because this part is usually deliberately concealed and it is the unmentionable part of the family story. It is only necessary to examine carefully each family story in order to note that every ordinary family is in fact full of drama. Often young people change themselves in order to rise to the expectations of their family. But family is like a stubborn old man who won't make any concessions to the needs of young people. Out of love and responsibility, young people stay in the family, but the inadequacies of the family often become the force which drives them out. They hate the father for his power; they hate their parents for failing to listen to them and for making decisions for them. On the other hand, paradoxically, they also "love" the family for the pressures it imposes on them. More accurately speaking, they are accustomed to the pressures imposed by the family. Once their parents let go, they become disorientated because they do not know what to do next. This sense of disorientation drives the young people back into the family. This paradoxical push-and-pull relationship like a "revolving door", precisely demonstrates young people's complicated and contradictory feelings towards the family. Maybe Freud is right—our most intense feelings towards people closest to us, such as our family, are perhaps ambivalent, i.e., composed of both love and hate.

Home is like an indestructible yoke. Not only are young people unable to cast it off, but also they do not want to. What they can do is push for changes at home or look forward to the future, longing to make up for the family's current inadequacies. In "The Ideal Home", we can see young people's demands and expectations of home. "Hope" may be able to help them find some improvement at home.

I believe that with hope, anything that is capable of change can be changed.

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Ada Lee Man-ching

*Drawing is thinking, thinking is life, life is thinking.*

Everybody has a childhood, or do they?

When I was little, I always derived the greatest pleasure from drawing. I loved to draw things with colour pens. I could draw anything, from mother washing the dishes to father sleeping. Eventually I had so many drawings that there was no more room for them. I thought they would certainly be thrown away by mother. To my surprise, when I came home one day, I found mother had put up all my pictures on the walls. I really felt very happy. After that, whenever I finished a drawing, I would find a space on one of the walls at home, so that it gradually became my art gallery. In retrospect, I am really very grateful to my parents for their encouragement and tolerance which gave me so much space in childhood. All the bits and pieces of my childhood are still vivid in my mind. Maybe this has to do with my having expressed myself and recorded my life through drawing! Although those drawings on the walls could not be taken with us when we moved house, every scene and object in them was already engraved on my mind.

When I grew up, I became a drawing tutor. During the nine years of this work, observing children drawing, I have been able to re-live the pleasures of my old dreams. Everything in the drawings is so natural and familiar.... Lines and figures which mean next to nothing to adults

actually enable children to enjoy telling me stories and so much about their feelings. Faced with children of limited verbal-reasoning ability, I have become more and more curious, dying to know more about the colours, the stories, the underlying feelings in their drawings.

Image is a visual sign as well as mental language. Drawing unites visual sense, image, emotion, aesthetic, and thinking. Through recognition and analysis of visual signs, mutual comprehension, communication, and care can be obtained. To teachers and parents who have received professional training, both children's drawings and adult graffiti are visual signs expressing life. Reading signs is like a Western doctor understanding his or her patient's condition through reading an X-ray photo, or a Chinese doctor feeling the patient's pulse. Children's drawings are the concrete manifestation of their feelings and perceptions, in other words, an external form of mental language, which contains many different languages, different moods, and different stories ... all their mental input and output. So what can be understood from children's drawings is far richer and deeper than talking to them face to face. Drawings can reflect our thoughts, our internal emotional world, our lives.

Family is the most important environment in the development of children. The role it plays is like a "dye vat". What kind of person a child will become largely depends on how this dye vat does its work! Everybody has their own family, and their views about family differ. To children, family is central. Parents are the centre of the family,

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the emotional fortress of children, the people with whom they have the most contact. They exert the greatest influence on children's personality, learning, and psychology (Qiu Lianhuang 1984). Many family problems are hidden behind the façade of a seemingly prosperous society. Many children's psychological problems are the result of their family experiences. The family's influence on the psychological development and health of a human being is much greater than people imagine (Wong 1988). A properly functioning family is a safe haven, a place in which one can divulge what is on one's mind, a place which provides energy and a motive for action. In a malfunctioning family, members are not good at understanding and communicating with each other. When in difficulties, they will blame each other. The frustrations and anxieties of the parents may also be projected onto the children, rendering them the victims of family conflicts.

Normally, as far as sociological studies on family are concerned, most respondents expressing views and expectations about family are parents or adult members of a family. This is because many adults (including sociologists), thinking that children are mentally immature, do not value their views. And there are also many people who are afraid of children's views and opinions, because they often lay bare truths that adults have been hiding, denying, and running away from. So they choose not to listen to children's views. But do we realize that children are also part of the family? Apart from being participants in the daily life of the family, they are also observers of the marital relationship, the key figures who turn husband and wife into parents (Laing 1971). Children have their own views and feelings about their family, but lack the means, space, and power to fully express them. Whether these views and feelings are expressed or not, determine whether children will grow up healthily. No comprehensive study could have been done without children's voice. We should not and could not afford to neglect children's views and feelings about family.

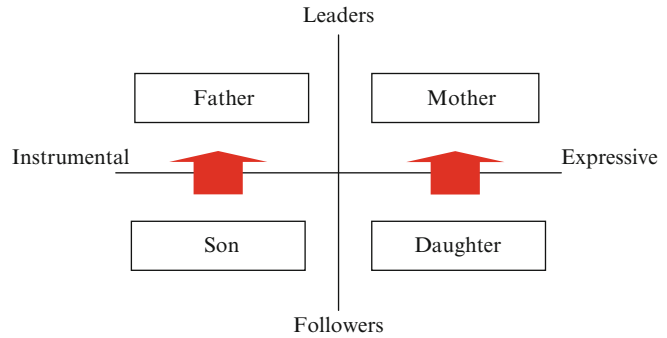
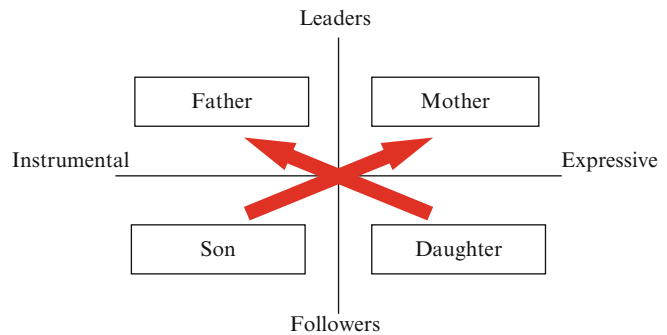
According to the [Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Government](#), the

number of divorces and separations granted to Hong Kong couples was 97,000 in 1996, rising substantially to 224,000 in 2006 representing a sharp increase of 130%. The sharp rise in the numbers of divorces and one-parent families in Hong Kong has meant more and more Hong Kong children grow up in incomplete families. Society often focuses on these children, deems that they have to face many family problems, and provides them with services and welfare to help them cope with problems arising from the incompleteness of their family. One of these services is Children's Home, the aim of which is to create a family environment for children to replace their incomplete family. However, while adults think that these services are able to help the children, do the children themselves think likewise? Is "Children's Home" a family? Does "incompleteness" necessarily mean "problem"? Does society not overemphasize the problems of these children of incomplete families?

What do children from incomplete families think about their own family? How do they depict their own family in their drawings? What do they think about their parents and themselves? My chapter attempts to answer these questions.

Children's Home is a home under the Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong Government. As the name implies, the purpose of this home is to provide children with family problems a place to feel "at home". Children's Home is managed by a surrogate family, where there are surrogate parents who strive to impact feeling of "family" to those children. The children have to follow regulations in the home; they have to eat, watch television, go to bed, and wash dishes according to a schedule and a division-of-labour plan.

The term "incomplete-family children" refers to children whose parents are divorced or separated, or who have been abandoned by one of the parents, or of whom one or both parents are dead. The 16 incomplete-family children who participated in my study in 2005 were all inhabitants of Children's Home, including six whose father was dead, two whose parents were both dead, and eight whose parents were divorced.

**Fig. 26.1** Family structure and functions**Fig. 26.2** Possible modes of child socialization into deviance

## The Literature

Parsons (1955) points out that although the modern family has lost certain functions, it has specialized in some other functions, notably in child socialization. Children learn from their parents' different social norms, values, and skills such as how to interact with people, in order to develop their own personality. Parsons thinks that children in the family learn from their parents the key elements of their own future parenthood, through the process of socialization (Parsons 1955). As Fig. 26.1 shows, the son learns to play the "instrumental", economic, or problem-solving role to become a father. The daughter learns the "expressive", emotional, caring role to become a mother.

However, if the father or the mother is absent from the family, how will the child be able to learn about their own future role in a family? Parsons did not answer this question. His research mainly focuses on the views of adults (parents) without regard to children's views. Moreover, Parsons assumes that children in the family will accept the parents' arrangements and guidance.

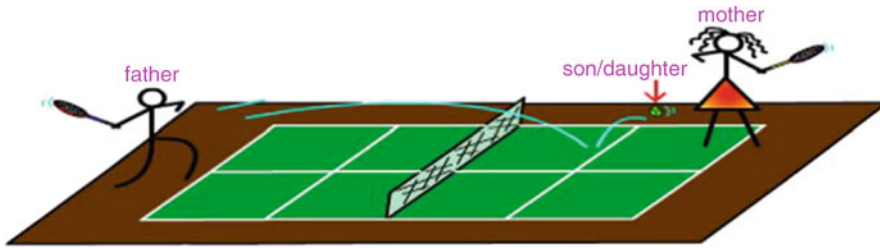
Alas, children have their own views and opinions as well as the will to resist.

Deviance, sociologically speaking, describes actions or behaviours that violate cultural norms, including formally enacted rules.

From Fig. 26.2 we can see that the son at home does not necessarily want to take over from the father the instrumental role. Instead, he may wish to play the expressive role of the mother, enjoying the time spent at home. The daughter does not necessarily want to take over from the mother the expressive role, either. Instead, she wishes to play the instrumental role of the father, relishing the time spent at work. In both instances, the son and the daughter thus socialized are considered as deviant.

Parsons (1955) also thinks that the family is the source of psychological gold, a place which brings happiness. The workplace tires us out; only at home can we enjoy happiness. Family makes us happy. But Parsons neglects the fact that family can also be a place which produces problems and brings its members displeasure, disputes, conflicts, troubles, and sadness. Family abuses, even kills.





**Fig. 26.3** Family as a tennis game

Laing (1971) thinks that family is about relations and interaction between parents and children. Starting from the birth of the child, the parents teach that only things in the family are good; that everything outside the family is bad and dangerous. The child also, unknowingly, becomes the key figure maintaining the marital relationship and communication. Family is like a tennis game (Fig. 26.3); the child is a tennis ball passed to and fro, bounced back and forth, by the husband and the wife as father and mother—in that many messages between them are conveyed by the child, the go-between, the third party.

Laing (1971) thinks that children are the most powerless group in the family, just like the tennis ball being bounced around by the parents in Fig. 26.3. When we look at family, we usually concentrate our attention on the parents playing the game but pay little attention to the ball (the child) being passed back and forth. This problem results from a failure to consider the child's point of view.

A family which breaks up as the result of an extra-marital affair is an apposite example. Everybody will sympathize with the abandoned wife and condemn the husband who abandons his wife and child, but very few people will spare a thought for the feelings of the child. Adults have the strength to pick themselves up and recover, no matter how serious their trauma may be. But the distress of children, who have no control over events, is often overlooked. Their failure to receive proper care and love will deeply affect their future development.

When Parsons and Laing study the family, they look at children in the family from an adult analyst's point of view. We have a sociology of the family in the eyes of the adult, not of the child.

The art therapist Lu Yaqing (2000) points out that drawing provides opportunities for non-verbal expression and communication. In the process of artistic creation, the artist is able to dedicate himself or herself to the subject of the event, lower his or her defences, and allow the unconscious to emerge. Artistic expression is integrative in terms of time and space. The artist is able to relate the expressed thought and emotion to the past, the present, and even the future.

Visual sociology lays particular stress on the social contagiousness of the visual sense in terms of the emotions. Before creating a work of art, the artist must first experience certain emotions, which he or she then conveys to other people by way of some external sign (such as drawings), in order to produce social contagion. From this it can be seen that the art of drawing begins with the individual evoking a certain experience and its related thoughts and emotions and giving them certain form by way of images (Chen Bingchang and Chen Xinmu 1975).

The artist, Wang Jiacheng (1975), thinks that children possess a "natural eye", which means that they have not yet been influenced by induction or rationality and therefore are able to accept paradoxical correlations. Images that arise in the mind without being controlled by observation can be self-sufficient. The writings and drawings of children are thus a poetic kind of intuitive action. What adults express in their drawings may be done for the people around to see, but what is expressed in children's drawings is mostly children's own thinking.

Drawings that children consider very normal and very natural may be shocking to adults. The characteristic of children's drawings is that their perspective is unsophisticated and their

expressions, highly naive. Children's drawings are not based on objective visual realism but derived from inner subjective emotions. The relations between human figures, animals, and space do not necessarily conform to a fixed perspective. They are not arranged in an orderly way as in the adults' world. Children's drawings are self-centred, with proportions and positions arranged subjectively. So children's drawings are unsophisticated, simple, and naive. Unaffected by rationality, they look at things innocently. Driven by subjective emotions, they put their unadorned inner feelings on paper (Lu Yaqing 1996).

The art therapist Fan Qiongfang (1996) thinks that children's drawings are executions of simple fine arts skills. The process of drawing, from imagination to expression, usually involves children at psychological, emotional, and cognitive levels. Children use a lot of symbols, just like codes, to express what they feel inside. The contents of their drawings are therefore a kind of mysterious and interesting metaphor.

The child psychologist Hu Baolin (1986) thinks that children's drawings very easily reflect their favourite colours and convey what they want to express. So the forms and colours depicted in the pictures are the portraits of their mind. As a result, quite a few studies of children's drawings point out that they are autobiographies, confessions, as well as their fingerprints, brain scans. Children's drawings enable us to catch a glimpse of the inner world of children.

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## Research Methodology

The research subjects of this chapter were 16 children (10 boys and 6 girls) from a Children's Home. They were all primary school pupils residing in a Children's Home. They only went home once or twice every week.

The 16 children formed eight drawing groups over a period of two months. To complement the group drawings, I collected additional data through the three steps of thinking, drawing, and talking in relation to a series of drawing topics. Their drawings involved altogether seven topics,

namely, "My Family", "The Home", "The Ideal Home", "My Father" "The Ideal Father", "My Mother", and "The Ideal Mother".

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## Analysis and Interpretation of Data

### My Family

Once, I saw a four-year-old boy playing a game with a three-and-a-half-year-old girl. The boy was riding a tricycle, and the girl was sitting at the back, holding a doll in one hand and a paper bag containing towels and clothes in the other.

I asked the girl, "Are you going to your gran's?"

The girl pretended to be worried and, in an adult tone of voice, said, "The kid is ill, I've got to take him to the doctor".

I also pretended to see the light suddenly, "Oh, yes! No wonder he (the boy) is driving so fast. He's a taxi driver".

The girl curled her lip as she corrected me, "I'm mum, he's dad. He's riding a motor cycle!"

Family is a microcosm of society, which is in turn an extension of family. Children are part of society. They have their own unique way of thinking, learning, playing, and expressing themselves—often artistically. We can see that the game above is children's imitation of family life and a representation of their experience. When the little girl is sick, her mother will hug her and hold the bag, while her father takes them on a motor cycle to see the doctor. From this we know that young children already have a certain concept of family and a certain understanding of daily family life. Some people compare family to a haven. Some people compare family to a warm stove. Others compare it to a gentle cradle. Yet others think family is prison, hell. What is family in the eyes of young children? How do they depict their own family in drawings? What kinds of family story can we see therein?

### Family Communication: Hugging Each Other

Human beings are social animals. Without communication, humans are just a physical body to



**Fig. 26.4** My family (Siu Yan)

each other. A belief in the importance of communication is a belief in human spirituality. The individual is single-faceted, while the family is a more or less integrated complex, in which there are neither absolute leads nor absolute minor roles. There are countless ties which tightly bind the family members to each other like an invisible net. Communication among the family members is an important element in building up relationships and maintaining kinship feelings (Lee Wai-yung 2003).

In the drawing, “My Family”, Siu Yan, 11 years old, draws a scene of her mother watching television together with her and her younger brother, with her mother’s arms around them. Siu Yan explains the drawing:

My younger brother and I do not have much to play with at home. Our sole fun is to hug mother, watch television together, and chat until half past ten, when we go to bed (Fig. 26.4).

Since Siu Yan’s father died while performing his duty as a fireman on the Chinese mainland, she, her younger brother, and their mother have depended on each other for survival. So communication with her mother is important to her. As a result, the scene of her, her brother, and mother

hugging each other whilst watching TV together is an important experience, which makes her feel they are family. Everybody needs understanding and care. Growing children particularly yearn for their parents’ attention and patience. However, in reality, many parents cannot let go of their sense of “dignity” and they often rudely reject their children’s demands for love. This is undesirable. Parent–child communication is often like talking with one’s past.

### **Expression of Expectations: “Daddy, Mummy, No More Fighting!”**

Laing (1971) thinks that the family is like a tennis game. Comparing the parents to the players and the child to the tennis ball, he points out that the roles played by the parents at home are active while the child’s is passive. But in his drawing, “My Family”, Siu Fung expresses his wish to play an active role.

In the drawing, “My Family”, (Fig. 26.5), Siu Fung, 7 years old, depicts how he tries to stop his parents fighting. In explaining the drawing, he says,

Before father passed away, he often quarrelled and fought with mother. The two of them were like

**Fig. 26.5** My family (Siu Fung)



armies to the left and right of the drawing, both armed. (Question<sup>1</sup>: How come father and mother are still smiling so happily when they are fighting?) Because I am an angel. With my magical powers, I hope to make them stop fighting and smile a lot. So, using my magical powers, I place a mansion between mum and dad. Also, dad is dead. He's now in Heaven. If I am an angel, I can fly up there and visit him!

Siu Fung's father died of cancer when he was at a tender age, but Siu Fung still retains a vivid impression of his parents quarrelling and fighting at home. So, even though his father has been dead for a few years, he still makes this scene the major episode in "My Family", showing how deeply this scene is imprinted on his mind. Most remarkably, he wishes he could become an angel so that he will be able to mediate between his parents, and fly to Heaven to visit his deceased father. The child

also senses that he could be the important figure binding his parents' marriage together. He thinks he is able to mediate between his parents when they fight, and this is also his imagination, his expectation.

### **A Family Characteristic to Be Proud of: "The Most Luxurious House"**

"Happiness" is a very popular word. It is an important aim of people in their lives, in their marriages and families. The happiness brought about by family is inestimable.

What children's young psyche sees is pure, sincere, and flawless things. This kind of joy is also a priceless treasure. While pursuing pleasure, adults should take children's feelings into consideration and help them to create an environment conducive to the pursuit of happiness (Song Xiufen and Zhuang Huiqiu 1986). Among the 16 children interviewed, Siu On puts into his drawing the family asset which makes him happy and of which he feels proud.

<sup>1</sup>"Questions" refers to the questions asked by the author of this chapter.





**Fig. 26.6** My family (Siu On)

In the drawing, “My Family” (Fig. 26.6), Siu On, 11 years old, draws a very luxurious house. In explaining the drawing, he says,

My home is very large and luxurious. It is the most gorgeous home in the whole world, because my family is the richest! So I can build the outer walls in different colours and use the most expensive materials. This is the most beautiful and gorgeous home in the whole world. (Question: Where are your family members?) I did not draw the members of my family, because they are never there. I live in the Children’s Home. My mother and sister are often away. I no longer see my father at home. My sister and brother do not live at home, either. That’s why I don’t want to draw anybody in the house....

Siu On’s mother is a hotel manager. His “home” is really richer than those of the others in the Children’s Home. But does belonging to a rich family mean happiness? When Siu On first talks about how rich his family is, and how gorgeous his house is, he unconsciously looks proud and self-important. But when he is asked about the members of his family, his face grows dark and he lowers his voice. Apparently, he feels unhappy about the state of his family. He feels sad about his father’s departure and the frequent absences of other family members—and he is reluctant to mention them of his own accord. In fact, even

though it may be the most gorgeous house in the world, is it a home or just a hotel if most of the time nobody is there and nothing happens there, be it happy or unhappy, and if the family members just sleep and shower there?

Siu On draws what he takes to be the most beautiful things in his home, so that he does not have to admit that his home life is what the outside world would call emotionally deprived, and in order that he will not be labelled a child from a problem family. These are what Laing (1971) calls denial and repression. Older children will try their best to forget, deny, repress, or avoid mentioning undesirable things about their family. They will repeatedly stress the merits of their family in front of other children. Only after repeated probing, can we begin to understand what they consider to be the less appealing side of their family.

### **Dissatisfaction with Family Members: “Mum Often Spies on Me”**

If parents want to empathize with their children, address their needs, and be liked by them, then, when they associate with their children, parents should not regard themselves as superior. They should not think they are experienced, learned,





**Fig. 26.7** My family (Siu Wai)

and always correct. More importantly, they should not take their own way as the only standard to assess whether their children's ideas are correct or not. Parents should clearly recognize that as human beings, they have shortcomings and mistakes, that they and children are equal in terms of character.

In the drawing, "My Family" (Fig. 26.7), Siu Wai, 8 years old, draws a house with three rooms. In the window of the room in the lower right-hand corner, he lightly outlines his mother's shape in pencil. Explaining the drawing, he says,

This is my home. There are three rooms. The highest one is mine; the one in the lower left-hand corner is my younger brother's, the one in the lower right-hand corner is my mother's. Because I like to be alone and I don't like my mother and brother coming to find me in my room, I like to live in the highest room. (Question: Why did you only draw mother at the window of the room in the lower right-hand corner?) It's because mother is very wicked. She likes to spy on me and my brother through the window or through the crack between the door and its frame, in order to find out what we are doing. If we are not doing revision, she will immediately rush in and scold us. I am very afraid of her.

From Siu Wai's drawing, "My Family", it can be seen that he does not like the company of his mother and brother. Neither does he like his mother's frequent interference in his activities. He is very dissatisfied with his mother's peeping behaviour. That is why he would like to live in the highest room so that nobody can disturb him. Though children are young, they have their own sense of dignity and way of thinking. Adults simply should not treat them in insensitive ways. Otherwise, things will just get worse.

Parents are a symbol of inviolable authority. They monopolize children's right to learn and to live. One cause of family tragedy may be the lack of equality among the family members. The role of the parents at home should be neither as judge nor as police officer, but as a schoolmate growing together with the child. Parents should not interfere too much with children's growth. They have to give them adequate free time and allow them the right to make plans and reach decisions. People who grow up in a free atmosphere will be healthier in their mind and body.

In the book, *Between Parent and child*, Ginott (1965) points out that if we observe everyday conversations between parents and children, we will notice that they really take in astonishingly very little of each other's words. The tone of their conversation sounds like a monologue on the stage. The monologue of one party contains criticisms and instructions while that of the other party contains denial and plea. This kind of tragic interaction occurs not because of lack of love, but because of lack of respect; not because of lack of wisdom, but because of lack of skill. For example, Siu Wai's mother lacks proper respect for others in communicating with her child, which widens the communication gap between them.

## The Home

### Living Under Rules

In the drawing, "The Home" (Fig. 26.8), Siu Kit, 6 years old, draws a representation of his life in the Home. Explaining the drawing, he says:

In the Home, we can't do anything, like watching TV or playing. We can only do housework and



**Fig. 26.8** The home (Siu Kit)

homework. Even when we're tired from doing the housework, we still can't play. What's more, we have to follow a lot of different rules. So there is no freedom. It's so miserable. (Question: Do you like living in the Home?) Of course not, because there is absolutely no freedom here!

From the contents of the interview above and from the drawing, we can see that in the mind of Siu Kit, the Home is a place without freedom. He thinks that in the Home there are a lot of rules to be followed and a lot of housework to do. There is no time for rest and fun. There are things which the children in the Home cannot do without the permission of the surrogate parents. They have less time for play than other children of the same age. Moreover, they have to be responsible for duties like housework, so that the children feel that there is no freedom there, that every second of their lives is governed by rules. Thus all these 16 children do not like living in the Home, and they think it is a place without freedom.

Children need to be able to play and it is their nature to want to. Play also accords with the needs of their physiological development. It can benefit their learning. Any game has rules for children to follow. From that, children can learn to interact with others. So repressing children's innate need

for play means removing their opportunities to learn from play.

### Living in Loneliness

In the drawing, "The Home", Siu Wai, eight years old, draws a small house and a robot to represent his life in the Home. Explaining the drawing, he says:

The Home is like a small house in the drawing, and I am like the robot in it. (Question: Why is the house so small?) Because although the Home is very large, I only like being in my bed in the room. So I've only drawn the room. (Question: Why are you a robot?) Because although the Home is very large, I have many things to do every day. I must obey auntie<sup>2</sup> (surrogate mother), otherwise I will be punished! (Question: Why are there no other people?) Because I seldom play with other kids. I don't like them. They don't usually help me, and I often quarrel with them. So I will not make friends with them! In the Home, I have no friends, and so I don't want to stay here! (Fig. 26.9)

From Siu Wai's drawing, we can sense his loneliness in the Home. There is only one single person in the drawing and a small room. He has

<sup>2</sup>"Auntie" is how children in the Home address the surrogate mother.



**Fig. 26.9** The home (Siu Wai)



**Fig. 26.10** The home (Siu Chiu)

no friends, nor is he happy. In fact, the soulless life of the Home makes the children feel like robots. Their life has been organized for them and they cannot live like ordinary children cared for by their parents. They feel intensely lonely.

### Living Under Pressure

In the drawing, “The Home” (Fig. 26.10), Siu Chiu describes the Home as hell. He explains,

I think the Home is like hell, where every kid leads a hard life. It seems that they are all maltreated.

(Question: By whom are they maltreated?) Auntie and uncle<sup>3</sup> (surrogate parents) are whipping us in the drawing! (Question: Do auntie and uncle beat you?) No, they don't beat us, but they often find fault with us. When we make a mistake, we are punished. They are like messengers from hell, who often maltreat us! (Question: Do you like living in the Home?) No, I hate it. I really hope to leave this nasty place as soon as possible!

Of the 16 children, Siu Chiu, 12 years old, is the oldest. He has been living in the Home for almost six years. What he thinks about the Home can be clearly seen from this drawing. He does not like the Home, because they have a hard life there which he compares to life in hell.

To summarize, judging by the above drawings, almost all of the Home images depicted by the children are negative. There are even children who describe the Home as hell. They think that living in the Home requires compliance with rules and orders. Punishments are rigorously carried out. Any activities related to "play" are forbidden. These all represent their dislike of the Home. In most of the drawings, the surrogate parents are not presented. Would these surrogate parents feel like parents to the children? Can the Home give the children a feeling of family?

## The Ideal Home

### Family Is Where You Are: "Living Alone on the Aeroplane"

Family is the foundation and nucleus of society as well as its epitome and symbol. A stable societal foundation is composed of stable families. In other words, stability is the ideal state of the family. However, in the innocent eyes of children, stability is not the essential requirement of an ideal family. There are even children who take instability to be the mode of their ideal family. Why so? Under contemporary societal pressure, all kinds of suffering are the reason for psychological trauma. Happy experiences are easier to forget. The more deeply hidden a memory is, the more it bewilders and affects one's psyche.

Most deeply hidden memories are unhappy, painful, and sad.

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home", (Fig. 26.11), Siu On, eleven years old, draws an aeroplane as his "ideal home". Explaining the drawing, he says:

In my eyes, the ideal home is an aeroplane. Living there, I will be able to fly everywhere freely. (Question: Only you alone live in the aeroplane? Anybody else?) Me alone, because I don't want to live with other people. I only want to fly the aeroplane alone in all directions!

Siu On considers an aeroplane to be his ideal home, in which he will live alone. Apparently, this is a result of his family situation. He does not want to live with other people; he does not want to have family; he only wants to have freedom. Many people wish to have a stable family where they live happily with other members of the family. But Siu On runs away from the members of his family and prefers the dynamic, mobile state of his ideal home. He wants to live in an aeroplane. Wherever the aeroplane lands is his home.

### Living with Animals: "Joy with Beasts"\*

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home", (Fig. 26.12), Siu Yan, eleven years old, expresses her wish to have the North Pole as her "ideal home". She says:

My ideal home is somewhere at the North Pole where I will live alone. I am not afraid of the cold, so I can live alone in an ice house. (Question: Why are there so many animals in the drawing?) Because I want to live with these animals. I don't like being with people. I like animals. When I have time, I can swim with them. How nice!

Like Siu On, Siu Yan wishes to live alone in her ideal home. Siu Yan chooses animals to be her companions, considering association with animals to be better or happier than that with humans. This is a result of her real family situation, which has made her reluctant to live with her family. Living alone or with animals is a kind of criticism of reality and an expression of discontent with family life.

### I Will Only Live with My Siblings: Deep Sisterly Affection

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home" (Fig. 26.13), Siu Lai, 10 years old, draws a large house as her

<sup>3</sup>"Uncle" is how children in the Home address the surrogate father.





**Fig. 26.11** The ideal home (Siu On)



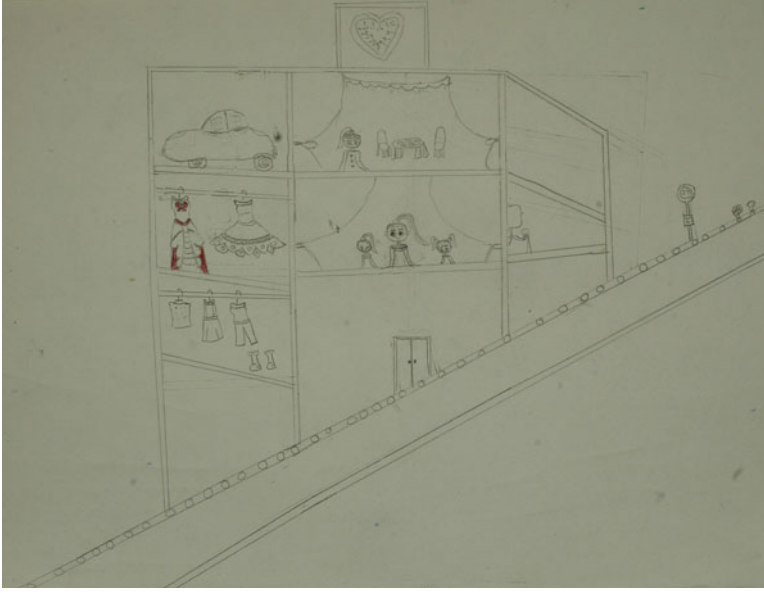
**Fig. 26.12** The ideal family (Siu Yan)

“ideal home” and wishes to live with her older sister there. In explanation she says,

My older sister loves me dearly. She often comes to the Home to visit me and take me out for a treat. So I am very fond of her. My sister is a fashion designer, and so she has a lot of beautiful clothes. I wish I had a very large house, in which I would

live with my sister. The house has to be very large, with a lot of rooms for my sister to store her beautiful dresses. (Question: You will only live with your sister? How about your dad and mum?) I don't like dad and mum. Neither of them loves me. They seldom come to the Home to visit me. They never take me out for a treat. So I won't live with them.





**Fig. 26.13** The ideal home (Siu Lai)



**Fig. 26.14** The ideal home (Siu Yin)

As a result of her parents' divorce, as well as the lack of love from both parents, Siu Lai has a strong emotional bond with her older sister, hoping to organize her ideal home with her sister. From that it can be seen that the older sister is Siu Lai's role model.

### Yearning for Freedom: Car as Home

In the drawing, "The Ideal home" (Fig. 26.14), Siu Yin, 12 years old, draws a car as his "ideal home":

I want a car as my home, because I will be alone and able to drive wherever I want to. Sounds great!



**Fig. 26.15** The ideal home (Siu Chiu)

When I have time, I can visit different friends. Free and easy. Truly wonderful. (Question: How about your family? Are they living in the same car?) No, I don't like being with them. They all get on my nerves. So I prefer being on my own, free and easy!

From this "Ideal Home" drawing of Siu Yin, it can be seen that he wishes to own an unstable and dynamic home. Wherever the car stops is his home. He yearns for freedom and does not like living with his family. These all reflect his dissatisfaction with reality. He does not like his present home, the Home, his family or his present life.

### **Solitude: The Golden House**

In the drawing, "The Ideal Home" (Fig. 26.15), Siu Chiu, 12 years old, depicts himself alone in a very large house. He says,

My ideal home is a very large house, in which I will live alone. There will be lots of gold. Preferably everything will be made of gold. This will prove that I am very rich. In a word, the house will be very large, large enough for me to play football and video games. Then it will be really ideal. (Question: Why do you want to live alone?) Because I don't want to live with anybody. Under no circumstances should dad and mum look for me. It would be best if they don't know where I live. Then I will not be scolded by them. Then I will be free to play video games, read comic books, and play football. (Question: Won't you feel bored?) No, certainly

not. Because I shall be so rich. I can do whatever I like. There will be video games, comic books and football. Why should I feel bored?

From this "Ideal Home" drawn by Siu Chiu and his explanation, we can infer that he is very dissatisfied with his family home and the Home. He wants to live alone and have freedom. His relationship with his parents is not good. Living in the Home is also hard for him. That is why he prefers to live alone, deeming that only living alone is the ideal state, enabling him to be free and happy.

In the children's drawings, most of their ideal homes are impracticable and fanciful in adults' eyes. For example, they prefer to live with animals in a house made of ice or to live in an aeroplane in the air. These may be described as non-homes. Moreover, in these "Ideal Home" drawings, the children seldom draw their present family. Although they have co-habitants in the drawings, they are all animals. Why do these children choose non-homes as their ideal homes? Why do they want to live alone or with animals instead of their family? For these children, who come from incomplete families, these "unrealistic" pictures fully depict their discontents with their family, the Home and real life.

### **“My Father”, “The Ideal Father”**

One weekend, a couple took their 6-year-old son to the park. On their way, they came across a man trying to sell a small electrical appliance. As the husband used to study electronics, he was very interested in the appliance. He fiddled with it for quite a while. As the man was eager to sell the product, he exaggerated and claimed that it was the most recent invention with the latest technology. Hearing that, the husband frowned a little bit. The son standing next to him understood what was going on and lost no time in saying to the salesman, “Don’t try to fool my dad, mister. He knows everything!” (Li Hong and Fang Baochang 2005). A telling phrase uttered by the son reveals a secret hidden in the mind of many a child: The father is their idol. In the mind of the child, the father is capable of doing anything in the world. The father is able to answer all the child’s questions; the father is able to repair broken toys as if he were performing a miracle. These all win the hero worship of the child, who is unfamiliar with the world.

However, while children treasure so much the time spent with their fathers, how do fathers view this father–son bond? If asked, “What is the most important thing for you?” most fathers would answer, “My children” or “My family”. Unfortunately, this oral claim is not borne out by the reality. This is especially clear when we observe how the fathers allocate their time and energy: “Would you please play with me, dad?” “Let me watch the game first”. “Let me read the paper first!” “I promise to play with you this weekend”. “I’m very tired now”. Goode (1992) suggests that the father’s excuses conceal the man’s laziness. Bearing the above-mentioned mode of interaction in mind, we are now going to explore how children depict their fathers, what kind of father is most ideal, and what kind of father–son stories can be seen from the drawings and interviews with the children.

### **Class Achievement: “Father’s Wounds”**

The principle of “men outside, women inside”, handed down through generations in China, has acquired a fixed position in the Chinese minds.

The husband usually works hard outside the home for the livelihood of the family, shouldering a responsibility different from the wife’s. As Parsons (1955) points out in his scenario of housework division, the husband plays an instrumental leader’s role at home and takes charge of the external affairs of the family, in order to fulfil the role and position assigned to him and expected of him by society. As a husband, a father, and a family head, he has an inescapable and heavy responsibility for the family economy, while the internal matters of the family fall on the shoulders of the wife. Under the insidious influence of socialization by their parents and society, the children also think that the father should go out to work and support the family. Further, they expect the father to have a good job, a responsible position, and a high salary.

Siu Yan’s father died a few years ago on the Chinese mainland. He was a fireman. In the drawing, “My Father” (Fig. 26.16), she draws him dressed in sports gear. She explains:

My dad was a fireman and had to take a lot of physical exercise in order to keep fit. So he was often dressed in sports gear. (Question: Did you like your father being a fireman?) No, because he had a hard time of it as a fireman on the Chinese mainland. After fighting a big fire, he would come home with quite a lot of injuries. When he came home, mum, my younger brother and I often had to help him dress the wounds. And each time dad looked as though he was in great pain. So I didn’t like him being a fireman!

Although Siu Yan never saw her father at work, from his scars she thinks that dad’s work was very hard, and she was not happy about her father’s job.

In the drawing, “The Ideal Father” (Fig. 26.17), Siu Yan draws a man in a suit, with a thick sheaf of papers in his left hand, and a cigar in his right hand. She explains,

I like to show dad sitting in a taipan chair dressed in a suit, because then he can work comfortably. When dad was a fireman, he had to work with the sweat pouring down his back every day. And mum thought that dad’s wages were very low. So I don’t want dad to be working hard out of doors, earning just a little money. I like to think of dad as a boss, sitting in the office, giving orders. In this way, he can earn a lot of money and he need not work so hard.

**Fig. 26.16** My father (Siu Yan)



**Fig. 26.17** The ideal father (Siu Yan)





Comparing Siu Yan's two drawings—"My Father" and "The Ideal Father", we see that she transforms her father from a fireman into a manager. She thinks that in this way her father will achieve more, be richer, and rise up the social ladder.

Through socialization by family, school, peers, and the mass media, the child learns the direct relationship between occupation and status in society, apart from the housework division model of "men outside and women inside". The work of the working class is usually connected with low achievement, low pay, and hard work, while the work of the middle class is usually connected with high achievement, high pay, and comfortable life.

### Emotional Need: "I Want Father to Hold My Hand"

A few years ago, there was a popular song called "I Love Someone who does not come home". The singer was a woman and the person who would not come home was a man. Men not wanting to go home are a social phenomenon. Men engaged in physical labour often want to play poker or chess after work. Men engaged in business have even more excuses—business negotiations, entertaining clients, carousing with colleagues. They have every reason to go home very late. Some men like to work overtime (Yang Yu 2003). The reason why men do not like to go home is largely connected with the social role they play. In society, the male is the lead. The centre of his life is work. Family is just his place of rest. After recharging his batteries at home, he still has to fight his corner in the world of work. In the evening, when he is supposed to go home, he is reluctant to do so, because of his subconscious attachment to work. Even chatting with colleagues after work is a manifestation of this kind of attachment.

To most men, career is the most important component of their life. When we ask a man who has just been fired what he feels, we will probably hear the following reply, "I feel that I am worthless". Apparently, workplaces are where men acquire their self-esteem. Women's magazines are always full of advice on how to be a mother.

But in men's magazines, there are almost no articles on fatherhood. This will inevitably make fathers think that bringing up children has nothing to do with men. Then what do children think about fathers wholly dedicated to their work?

The last time Siu Kei, 10 years old, saw her father was during the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome<sup>4</sup>) epidemic in Hong Kong. So, in the drawing, "My Father" (Fig. 26.18), she draws how she saw her father for the last time. She explains,

I haven't seen dad for a long time. The last time I saw him was during the SARS epidemic, when classes were suspended. We were wearing masks, and could not see each other's faces. And I was very upset! (Question: Why are you crying in the drawing?) Yes, when I saw dad last time, I really cried, because dad said that he was going to work on the Chinese mainland and therefore would not be able to visit us for some time. At that time, I was really very upset and could not stop crying.

Siu Kei, who lives in the Home, treasures every opportunity to meet her father and every moment she spends with him. As soon as she had learnt that her father would not be able to see her very often due to his work, she became very sad and depressed. Time spent with the father is very precious for both the father and the child. When the father is willing to share his precious time with his child, he is implicitly conveying the following message to the child, "You are very important to me". A father who is willing to give is actually implicitly conveying to the child love, care, and respect. In the eyes of the child, the parents are the most respectable people in the world. If the parents deem it worthwhile to give the child their complete love and attention, the child will be fully aware of his or her importance to them.

In the drawing, "The Ideal Father" (Fig. 26.19), Siu Kei depicts herself and her father, but this time they are not wearing masks, and the girl in the drawing is not weeping. The father is even holding her hands. She says,

<sup>4</sup>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory disease in humans which is caused by the SARS coronavirus. In early 2003, SARS spread from the Guangdong province of China to rapidly infect individuals in some 37 countries around the world.



**Fig. 26.18** My father (Siu Kei)



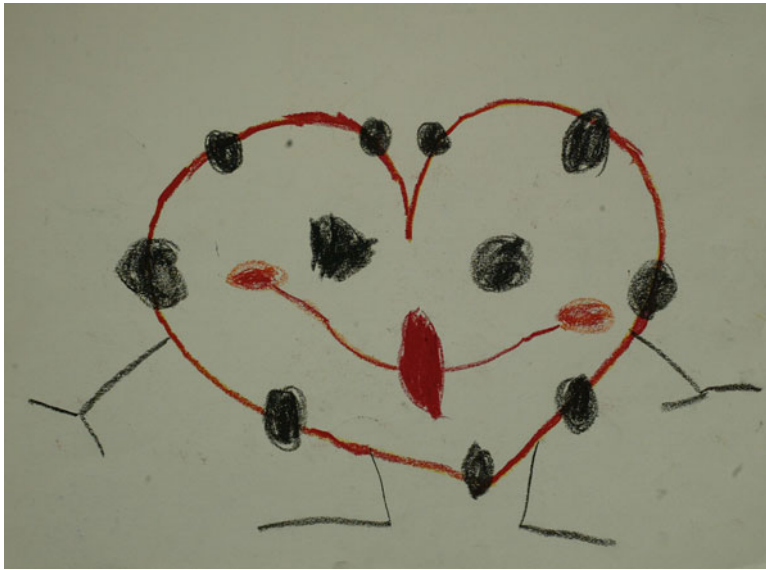
I wish dad could spend more time with me and take me on trips. I also wish he would hold my hand and go for walks with me. Whenever dad takes me out, he doesn't want to hold my hand. So I wish he would take me by the hand and go everywhere with me. This is bound to be good for both of us.

Compare the two drawings of Siu Kei and it can be seen how deeply she longs to spend more time with her father. She also wishes she and her father could have a happy life together.

Many men think that bringing up children is mostly a woman's job. So when a man actively plays the role of the good, caring, loving father, he may be worried that he has encroached on the woman's preserve. Fatherhood may thus threaten manhood—and perhaps also motherhood, and fathers may feel that focusing on caring in everyday life will compromise their masculine image. It is noticeable that when men get together to reaffirm their manhood, their conversation is limited to the following four topics—sport, money, work, and sex. They may think that children are a topic of conversation for women only.



**Fig. 26.19** The ideal father (Siu Kei)



**Fig. 26.20** My father (Siu Wai)

Particularly regrettably, they get no respect from their peers for having a caring relationship with their children. As men they may perhaps be more concerned to impress others with how they have prospered in their careers.

Men often think that children prefer their mothers' company to that of their fathers. This may be because women, in associating and interacting with children, seem to be more enthusiastic and focused than men. Women are more capable of appreciating children. Although most daughters (especially little girls) seem to be more attracted to their mothers, it is easy to discover that daughters actually prefer to be with their fathers. It is because the father makes the daughter feel special. Actually, the daughter indeed recognizes the difference between herself and males (including her father). The relationship built up between every parent and their children is unique. When a father interacts with his daughter, he does not have to imitate the behaviour of his wife. He can provide the daughter with another kind of parental role model such as instrumental leadership. This will help her to interact with different people in her future life. When it is necessary to make important life decisions, she will be able to draw knowledge and inspiration from these two different styles and modes of life.

### **The Imaginary Father: "A Big Heart and a Small Heart"**

Children need a father who is willing to play the father's role, better still, caringly and lovingly. Masculinity cannot be acquired by taking any course. It can only be learnt from the father in everyday life, with the father as the model. No childhood need is so strong as the need for the father's protection. From infancy, the child is aware that there is a father who can protect one from danger. However, among the 16 children from incomplete families, some have never seen their father. Maybe they have learnt something about their father from their mother, but there is simply no impression of their father in their mind. So the drawings of "My Father" and "The Ideal Father" all come from their imagination.

Siu Wai, 8 years old, has never seen his father. He has only learnt from his mother that his father died of cancer. He has no impression whatsoever of his father. In the drawing, "My Father" (Fig. 26.20), a heart is drawn to represent his father. He says,

I have never seen my dad. He is dead, but mum tells me that dad is in my heart. I think dad must be a happy man, so I drew a heart to represent dad! (Question: Why are there so many black spots on the heart?) Mum told me that dad died of cancer. These black spots are cancer gems that killed dad.



**Fig. 26.21** The ideal father (Siu Wai)

From the drawing, “My Father”, and his explanation, we can see that Siu Wai knows the fact and the cause of his father’s death. But what is surprising is how he can so easily narrate something people usually consider to be extremely sad. Judging from the easy tone of Siu Wai’s speech, it seems that he has already accepted this distressing fact. Or maybe he thinks that this is just a very ordinary thing. What concerns me is whether he, an 8-year-old boy, has accepted this distressing fact or has simply failed to grasp the significance of this event. After all, Siu Wai represents the father he has never met with a heart. From this it can be seen that although in Siu Wai’s mind, there is no impression of his father, the father really exists in his mind.

In the diagram of “The Ideal Father” (Fig. 26.21), Siu Wai also represents his father with a heart. But this time, he draws another smaller heart to represent himself:

If father were still around, I would want him to spend time with me, play with me, go shopping with me, and take me out, so that we would both be very happy. (Question: Why are there no black spots on the heart?) Of course, there are none. I don’t want father to suffer from cancer. Had it not been for cancer, father would not have died, and we would have been able to see him very often.

Although Siu Wai has never seen his father, he hopes to live with him. This shows that children

value their association with their father. Comparing Siu Wai’s drawings, we can see that, although Siu Wai has no impression of his father and is not clear whether his father has ever lived with him at all, he thinks that it would be wonderful to spend time with him.

From what Siu Wai says, we can see that when we spend time listening to children’s simple and unadorned speech and get them thinking, we can begin to understand the way they look at the world. Children’s replies enable us to understand better how they think and how they interpret events in their little world. They can bring their parents joy; their unique perspective and sincere attitude will astonish adults; their outstanding imagination and creativity are amazing, enabling adults to look at the world from a completely new angle. Siu Wai is a case in point. With no impression whatsoever of his deceased father, he represents the father’s image with the “heart”, which impresses us with his unique way of expressing himself as well as his deep feelings for his father.

Children value the time they spend with their father, and fathers need to spend time to establish a close relationship with their children. However, adults often tend to be casual in their relationship with their children. Many fathers think that their work has a bigger claim on their time and their children can wait—often forever.

Meanwhile, children wait and wait. The father may live until 80 years of age, or maybe longer. But what if his life is not so long? What if everything comes to an end tomorrow? And the father will not have a second chance to watch the child grow up. This precious time will never come again.

### **“My Mother”, “The Ideal Mother”**

During the second half of his life, a husband always feels guilty towards his wife. One day an earthquake occurred, causing the husband to jump out of bed and run out into the courtyard. It was only after the earthquake stopped that he saw his wife running out with their three children. The husband said to the wife, “Thank you for forgiving me for thinking only of myself at the critical moment. But I didn’t mean to. It was just a moment’s confusion and panic that caused me to run out without thinking” (Yang Yu 2003). This husband really revealed the crux of the problem. Generally speaking, women are accustomed to devoting themselves to their family and caring about their husbands and children. On the other hand, husbands’ concern for their wives and children is much more casual. It is precisely because of this difference that the husband’s first reaction in an emergency was to think only of saving himself.

The idea of “women being responsible for internal affairs” in traditional Chinese families explains the behaviour of the mother above as well as highlights the role of women in the family. Just as in the housework division scenario of Parsons (1955), the wife plays at home the role of an expressive leader, who takes care of the children and the internal affairs of the family, in order to fulfil the role as expected by society. From the children’s drawings below about their mothers, we can learn the children’s different views about their mothers. Under the insidious influence of socialization by their parents and society, most of the children think that the mother had better stay at home to be a housewife, and they hope that the mother will spend more time with them.



**Fig. 26.22** My mother (Siu Yin)

### **Ordinary Mother: “Mahjong Armour and Cooking Apron”**

“Before marriage, obey the father; when married, obey the husband; in widowhood, obey the son”. This kind of rule imposed by Chinese tradition on women fully reveals the traditionally subordinate role and position of women. In the past, women mostly relied on their husbands for survival. When their husbands died, they relied on their sons. This deep-rooted attitude is expressed in the adage “Frailty, thy name is woman”. However, in recent years, quite a few independent and tough women have come on the social scenes so that the frail image of women is no longer so widely accepted. Nonetheless, do children like their mothers to be tough women? Compare Siu Yin’s drawings, “My Mother” and “The Ideal Mother”, and we will see that she does not like, and is dissatisfied with, her mother’s present glamorous look. Siu Wai, instead of wanting her mother to be as rich, as powerful, and as accomplished as her father, wants just an ordinary mother.

When the father of Siu Yin, 12 years old, died, he had been living with him, his mother, younger brother, and sister. In the drawing, “My Mother” (Fig. 26.22), Siu Yin depicts a beautifully dressed mother. He says,





**Fig. 26.23** The ideal mother (Siu Yin)

Mum is usually dressed very beautifully. Every evening she puts her make-up on and goes out to play mahjong. Mum always goes to mahjong in this dress. She calls this dress her armour, which always enables her to win money. So she always dresses up to the nines when she goes to play mahjong.

The cultivation of all the child's good habits depends on its parents, in particular, their words and deeds in everyday life. And the child has to rely on the parents as example and model. But where may the role model for Siu Yin come from when his family is without a father and his mother often neglects her children?

In the drawing, "The Ideal Mother" (Fig. 26.23), Siu Yin draws a very fat, aproned mother. In explaining his drawing, he says,

This is my ideal mother. She's very fat. Wearing an apron, she is always cooking for us. (Question: Why do you like mum to be fat?) Because I don't want her to dress herself up so beautifully. I prefer her to be dressed plainly and to be at home with us every day, cooking for us.



**Fig. 26.24** My mother (Siu Chiu)

Compare the two drawings of Siu Yin, and we can see that he does not like his mother's present look. This is because his mother dresses up not for the benefit of her family, but for the benefit of the people she is going to meet for mahjong. So Siu Yin prefers an ordinary mother who will keep him company most of the time.

### **Emotional Need: "I Want Mother to Watch Me Play Football"**

The child is the future of the parents and the blossom of the family. Communication with the child is communication with one's own past. If the parents cannot communicate effectively with the child, they will have to face the child who is unable to grow healthily and a future without self-awareness.

In the drawing, "My Mother" (Fig. 26.24), Siu Chiu, 12 years old, depicts his mother looking angry. He says,

This is my mum looking angry. When she flares up, both my older brother and I are really scared. (Question: Is it you who upsets her?) No! I don't often make mum angry. She's a very hot-tempered person. Sometimes, when she comes home and has a row with dad, she gets very angry, and she takes





**Fig. 26.25** The ideal mother (Siu Chiu)

it out on my brother and me non-stop. Sometimes she even beats us up. That's why we are very worried when she gets angry!

From Siu Chiu's drawing and interview, it can be seen that both of his parents are moody people. And Siu Chiu has described how he and his brother are afraid of their parents' temper. Parents plant a seed in the emotional garden of children, which will grow in time. To certain families, this seed is "love, respect and autonomy". But there are also families like Siu Chiu's, which plant the seed of "fear, obligation or guilt" in the inner world of children. There is a comic book which describes how people vent their emotions, especially anger. The first scene of one of the chapters is a boss yelling at one of his employees. Obviously, the employee now feels like yelling at someone in order to let off steam about his own grievances. So the second scene shows him going home and yelling at his wife. The third scene is the wife shouting at her children. Then the children kick their dog, which then bites a cat. This comic aptly describes Siu Chiu's family situation. In the comic, people vent their anger on vulnerable objects, which easily become a scapegoat, rather than on the initiator. The family drama is a power play.

In the drawing of "The Ideal Mother" (Fig. 26.25), Siu Chiu draws the sight of his

mother coming to the football ground and watching him play football. He says,

I really love football. If only mum would come and see me play football! (Question: Has your mother ever come to the playing fields to see you play football?) No! Not once! She often says she doesn't like me playing football. Every time we go home after playing football, she gets mad! So I really wish she would come and see me play football. I don't expect her to come every time. Once would be enough, if only she would!

From Siu Chiu's drawing, "The Ideal Mother", it can be seen that he very much wants his mother to spend more time with him. He also wants his mother to accept him and his older brother, to accept their hobbies and approve of them. From that it can be seen, all children, no matter how old or young they are, want better communication with their mother and her support, encouragement, and approval.

Now the greatest threat to society is the increasing challenge to the stability of family. The rate of divorce and the proportion of one-parent families are gradually rising. The deficiency of supportive forces such as marital and parent-child bonds is responsible for a major crisis of the modern family. Children nowadays are lonelier and lonelier, because they lack the power of love, the emotional support of parents who will pat them on the head, put an arm round their shoulders, and say with

appreciation in their eyes, “Well done! Good kid!” Emotional support in the family is its solid foundation, the source of a happy life in the family, sunlight for the healthy emotional growth of the children. This kind of emotional support is two-way and interactive—parents should become the emotional support of children; and children are also the emotional support of parents (Engel 1998). When there is reciprocal emotional support in the family, an indestructibly strong centripetal force will be generated, helping each and every member of the family to develop well as an individual.

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## Conclusion

The family is constantly changing. Just as the times change, so does the family. Society’s politics, economy and ethos all influence the family’s constitution and organization. Along with the growth of children and family members, the family grows. A three-year-old child obediently holds its mother’s hand while crossing the road, whereas a 6-year old tries to let go of its mother’s grip. No matter how worried or reluctant the mother may be, she has to learn to let go of the hand, acknowledging the gradual maturation of her child. No one will deny the importance of family to children. Strangely, though we all live in our family, feel its atmosphere and rely on its pulse and breath, we seldom look at the family from the point of view of children.

Many children express in their drawings the wish to have more power, more ability, and greater freedom. This is different from Parsons’ findings. Parsons (1955) thinks that through socialization, children learn to be the future parent, inheriting the instrumental and expressive roles in the family. But in their drawings, children do not indicate that they want to be a father or a mother in the future. They only address the current situation and wish to have more power, more ability, and more freedom. Parsons also thinks that family is the source of psychological gold, a place that can bring happiness. But what is expressed by the children in their drawings is all sombre faces of family. So in the minds of

children, family is not necessarily a happy place as maintained by Parsons, but a place that brings them problems and unhappiness.

Laing (1971) thinks that the family is about relationship between parents and children. But the children think otherwise. The family in the mind of the children is unique. In the children’s drawings, family is a clearly demarcated space. Everything inside the house is part of their family, while everything outside is not their family. Family is time. Some of the children think that their family in the past was happier and so they choose to draw their family in the past. Some of them think that their present family is happier, and so they choose to draw the present family. Some of the children yearn for the future family and draw the family they may have in the future. Children’s family can have three different times and spaces. Family is family members. The children think that family members are their family but some do not think so. Family is yearning. Some of the children are dissatisfied with their past and present families and they yearn for their future family.

Family is feeling. Some of the children think that the kinship feelings between them and their family are their family. Family is problems. Some of the children think that family is the site of problems.

The children interviewed think that in reality the family is the source of problems, which makes them unhappy. A children’s home can provide them with their daily necessities but not kinship feelings. Kinship, family members, and family are irreplaceable. The foster parents in Children’s Home cannot replace the children’s fathers and mothers. Neither does the Home enable these children from special families to regain the feeling of home. The ideal homes in the children’s minds are not homes in the eyes of the adults. By drawing “non-family homes” as ideal homes the children are expressing dissatisfaction with their families in real life. These “non-realistic” ideas represent their criticism of, and discontents with, family members, the Home, family, reality, life, and living.

Family is multi-faceted, with a tender and happy side as well as an unspeakable side. As Laing (1971) says, many people particularly



**Fig. 26.26** My family (Siu Si)

emphasize the up or bright side of family. In that kind of “harmonious” family atmosphere, all problems, resentment, and traumas cannot make their appearance. They are suppressed, repressed, shut out of consciousness and memory. As a result, what we see is a happy family photo, in which every member reveals a face that smiles, for the benefit of the outsiders and the insiders, while private bitterness is hidden away in the heart. Society has taught all of us through socialization to play the happy family game (Laing 1971).

Through socialization, children learn from their parents how to stress the good side of the family in front of others. But simultaneously they practise denial and repress unhappy thoughts. Just as the art therapist, Lu Yaqing (2000), and the artist, Wang Jiacheng (1975) have pointed out, drawing provides an opportunity for non-verbal expression and communication. The characteristic of children’s drawing is that their view of objects and events is pure and innocent and expressed very sincerely. They look at objects and events with “an innocent eye”, and put their internal feelings on the drawing paper, by way of images untainted by reason and driven by subjective emotions and feelings.

Take Fig. 26.26 as an example. At first sight, ordinary people may think that it is a drawing depicting a happy family on a day out. In reality, this is the 8-year-old Siu Si’s depiction of how she and her younger sister have to separate their parents, who are always fighting, before they can enjoy a day out together. If we are prepared to put aside the adult perspective, and to open our eyes to see what children’s drawings are really telling us, we will know that children have bad feelings about the down and dark side of their family. We will then learn of their grievances against family members, their dissatisfaction with the family home, their place in it, their reality: The drawings of children tell only one thing: the truth.

A child’s drawing is a key to open the door of the heart. When children draw, they do not follow the outer appearance of the object; instead they draw the image in their mind according to their own perspective. Children’s drawings reflect their internal world. Knowing how to read children’s drawings means finding the door or window to the inner secrets of children. So starting with children’s drawings, and assisted by their own explanations, we can find out what they think about

their family, and about themselves. If children's drawings are viewed in chronological order, they can be read as an epic of the life process. This epic is beautiful, splendid, full of fancies and miracles, and reveals the happenings in each and every stage of the child's development. In this epic we encounter the physiological and psychological story, the conflict within the individual, conflict between individuals, conflict between self and society. When carefully reading these children's drawings, which reflect their life process, we will notice the spindrift resulting from different kinds of conflict. It not only covers a wide range, but also involves individual orientations and forces constantly shifting between concealment and conspicuousness, strength and weakness, joy and sorrow. New-born babies are like a blank piece of paper, but society, parent-child relationships, and the family write on it, constructing babies' biographies and trajectories. May all the parents in the world be able to make good use of children's drawing as key to the inner yearning, needs, and desires of children and understand their inner world.

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Tse Pik-chu

The concept of privacy comes from the West. With the great technological advances of the modern era, communication between different parts of the world is becoming more and more frequent. Then there is also the influence of mass media such as television, newspapers, and the internet. As a result, the concept of privacy has been introduced to different places. Influenced by both Western and Chinese cultures, Hong Kong is rather receptive to the concept of privacy. With the deepening of the reform and opening-up of China, interaction between Hong Kong and mainland China is increasingly frequent. Under the influence of the mass media, Chinese people's understanding of privacy is growing.

So far the concept of privacy has not received a clear definition. In practice, privacy concerns the manipulation of boundaries, and the openness of boundaries varies from one person to another (Chan 2001). Most of the discourses about privacy in society are centered upon the right to privacy. Privacy is in fact a complicated concept, which is not limited to the control of information (Chan 2001). It has an objective definition, but it also varies according to regional cultural differences and differences in individual subjective understanding.

Westin points out that privacy involves four situations: (1) solitude, i.e., being alone and

unobserved by other people; (2) Intimacy—the individual builds up intimate relationships with other people in different small groups, while the individual groups remain separate from people outside the group and from other groups; (3) anonymity—in public places, the individual has the right not to be identified; (4) reserve—including the protection of personal information, establishment of psychological barriers, and avoidance of disturbance (see Chan 2001).

As judged from the four situations above, privacy as confidentiality of personal information only represents one of the privacy situations. Perhaps we can say that the media have tried to turn privacy into a specific, single-definition issue, by focusing on privacy defined as confidentiality. Many people interpret privacy as confidentiality and the inviolability of personal information, especially in everyday social interaction. Most people are familiar with terms like “business secret,” “personal information,” and “absolutely confidential.” Nonetheless, what this chapter is going to discuss is neither social nor business privacy, but privacy in the family.

Social changes, such as industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, influence people's thoughts and behavior. The concept of privacy derives from people's pursuit of individualism in the process of modernization. How do the Chinese view this issue? Social changes have an impact on the structure of the family and the functions of its members. Relationships between family members should move in the direction of equality. In that case, is privacy in the family able

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to reflect this orientation? Or, as the famous Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong (1992) asks, is the social structure of China ordered according to the closeness of relationships between people, and is it reflective of a certain differential pattern? Or, as the sociologist Chan puts it, are family relationships, such as father–son, husband–wife, sibling–sibling, ranked according to status? This grading of relationships has led to differences in those matters which are reserved and those which are shared by family members, so that privacy in the family manifests a certain hierarchical structure.

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## Literature Review

### Concept of Privacy

Lin (2001) thinks that the modern notion of privacy is in itself closely connected with the media. The modernization of communications and transportation and the rapid development of mass media have ended the era of isolation and mutual separation. Now personal space needs protection and the circulation of information has to be limited, too. Lin (2001) also points out that privacy is personal and unconnected with public social life. It involves private affairs which one does not want others to know about or interfere with.

With improvements in science and technology, the development of the media makes the world smaller and smaller, and the opportunities to violate privacy keep growing. How to protect personal privacy and important information from violation and illegal abuse is the concern.

In respect of the treatment of privacy, Chan (2001) quotes Westin's concept in his article, and points out that privacy involves four situations as mentioned above: solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve. The functions of privacy include (1) personal autonomy, i.e., dealing with important issues based on personal independence and identity and from the point of view of the individual; (2) emotional release, i.e., allowing people to be released from social roles and to do things they like to do, without public influence;

(3) self-evaluation, i.e., the individual can assess or plan their future actions according to their own experience; and (4) limited and protected communication, i.e., privacy provides an opportunity to meet other people or small groups alone, such as one's lover or spouse.

Altman (1976) thinks that privacy has two important aspects: desired privacy and achieved privacy. The former refers to an ideal degree of interaction with other people as expected by the individual or group, i.e., in a specific period of time, the amount of contact with the external world as expected by the individual or group.

The latter refers to contact with others in practical interaction. If the former is equal to the latter, an ideal situation (the best state) will have been achieved. If the latter is more or less than the former, i.e., there is too much or too little contact, a state of imbalance will prevail and result in dissatisfaction on the part of the person concerned. In addition, he thinks that privacy is a dynamic process, in which certain forces lead to different degrees of accessibility on the part of the individual—openness (encouraging contact) or reticence (avoiding contact). The tension among these forces varies with changes in the external environment. Moreover, privacy may involve different social units and social relationships, such as interpersonal relationships and relationships between the individual and the collective.

To sum up, privacy is a process of manipulating personal boundaries. Privacy is active and dynamic, i.e., it varies according to different times and situations. By way of contrast, when privacy is less than expected, people feel violated (their privacy is violated) and oppressed. But what is too much or too little contact and what is the ideal state depends on the individual's expectations and definition of privacy.

### Privacy in the Family

"Privacy in the family" is different from "family secret." "Family secret" refers to a happening in the family as an integrated unit, which the family does not want outsiders to know (such as domestic

violence). This is inseparable from the family as a unit of privacy. What this chapter seeks to study is the boundary of privacy rather than the family secret unknown to outsiders. Chan<sup>1</sup> (2000) thinks that privacy should not be demarcated in terms of family. Any person should be able to form different units of privacy with non-family members. That is to say, the privacy range of the individual includes non-family as well as family members.

In traditional Chinese society, the strong family concept makes family an important privacy element (unit). However, individuals in the family can still have different views about privacy. Chan (2000) points out that privacy comes from negotiation,<sup>2</sup> that one's role and status in the family will influence one's opportunity for negotiation. Chan (2001) points out that traditionally, the family undeniably is a particularly important group, in which the members are very close to each other. Individuality is seldom emphasized, so that in traditional Chinese culture, privacy is often demarcated in terms of family, rather than in terms of the individual or other group units as in the West. Because in the traditional culture of China, interpersonal relationships such as ruler–subject, father–son, husband–wife are in essence unequal, the circulation of information is unequal, too. However, although the traditional culture of China already contains the essence of privacy, the concept of privacy therein is more obscure. Its boundary, range, and appearance are all different from the West. The privacy enjoyed by individuals in a small group is influenced by their position in the social community.

What Chan discusses is Hong Kong people's view of privacy. Hong Kong is a place influenced by both Western and Chinese cultures, so that people's view of privacy is also influenced by Western and Chinese sources. Nonetheless, as Chan says, Hong Kong has seldom discussed

privacy, such as how the individual may distinguish between personal and family privacy, or what forms the privacy territory of the family may take. In fact, the Chinese mainland seldom discusses this, either. This chapter will use the example of Hong Kong as a blueprint for understanding privacy in mainland families and comparing the two situations.

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## Studies for Reference

### Privacy in Hong Kong: Concept and Empirical Analysis

Travers (1984) and Chan (2001) have carried out studies of how the need for privacy is manifested by Hong Kong people. Having analyzed two empirical studies of Hong Kong, Chan finds that solitude is the most important privacy requirement of Hong Kong people, while anonymity is not a major concern. Hong Kong people enjoy the key privacy elements of solitude, reserve, and domestic privacy. The interviewees attach most importance to personal correspondence and think that their families do not have the right to open and read their letters. As regards whether to discuss with one's family issues like one's studies, further education or employment, the boundary between the individual and the family is generally rather permeable but the degree of permeability varies considerably, depending on the family members concerned. The boundary between husband and wife is most permeable, followed by that between parent and child, while the boundary between the individual and the parent-in-law is almost impassable. The discussion of personal or confidential matters, or the expression of pent-up feelings, often crosses family boundaries. In addition, almost all interviewees share personal information with their colleagues, schoolmates, and friends. Quite a few of them discuss problems with, ask the advice of, or pour out grievances to, people outside their family.

The investigations also find that when making important choices, the interviewees usually consult their family. When they are in a bad mood, they talk to both their family and others (mostly,

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<sup>1</sup> Chan Ying-keung has done quite a few studies about privacy in the family. All "Chan" citations below refer to the same person.

<sup>2</sup> Pruitt (1981) points out that negotiation is the process of two or more units making a joint decision. Different units will negotiate, compromise and make concessions concerning conflict of their own needs, in order to reach a consensus.

friends, schoolmates, and colleagues of the same sex, but also quite a few persons of the opposite sex). Regardless of their age, working people usually consult their colleagues, while students usually seek out their schoolmates. It can thus be seen in certain domains of privacy, such as reserve, the boundary between friends may be more permeable than that between family members (Chan 2001).

Furthermore, because of the different status of family members, the permeability of boundaries may vary according to the relationships involved (Chan 1999). Information sharing between husband and wife, between parent and child, and between siblings varies considerably. The small circle of privacy may involve non-family members. It can thus be seen that privacy is not confined to the personal domain. It can exist at the same time in public areas such as workplaces or places of learning, between friends and neighbors (Chan 2001).

### **Privacy in the Family: Its Hierarchical and Asymmetric Nature**

Chan (2000) analyzes the data obtained in the 1995 Hong Kong social indexes survey, including the willingness to raise the barrier of personal privacy, the chosen object of consultation about personal issues, and the sharing of personal experiences (such as love). All these depend on the different background of the interviewees, such as gender, age, employment, education, marital status, and family role. It is found that the privacy boundary between husband and wife is most permeable, and married, older, and less educated women tend to have greater openness and are more willing to cross boundaries with respect to their spouses. By way of contrast, the openness of the individual in relation to other family members and children is lower and influenced by the personality and attitude of the interviewee.

In this respect, married, older, and less educated or non-working women are less protective of their privacy boundary in relation to their children. This may be connected with the traditional concept that a woman in her old age should obey

her son. Permitting one's children to cross the boundary of privacy may harmonize the relationship with them. For single, young, working, or relatively well-educated males, their family occupies a more important position. This may be a result of traditional Confucianism, which emphasizes the individual's filial piety and obedience to the family and discourages the individual from hiding anything from the family.

Chan (2000) points out that compared with the boundary between the individual and the family and that between the individual and their children, the boundary between siblings is less permeable, while that between individuals and their parents-in-law is almost impassable. It can thus be seen that privacy in the family is manifested hierarchically. The investigations find that different relationships manifest unequal degrees of privacy, according to hierarchy in, and closeness, of the relationship. Among newly married people, women discuss personal matters with their spouses more than men do; children tend to give more power to, and discuss personal matters with, their parents more than the other way round.

In terms of sharing personal experiences, spousal, parent-child, and sibling relationships do not differ significantly. But in terms of discussion of personal issues, the boundary between women and their children is more open than that between men and their children.

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### **Research Method and Background of Interviewees**

As its blueprint this chapter is based on two articles<sup>3</sup> written by Chan on privacy, with qualitative analysis as its methodology and the use of

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<sup>3</sup>Chan Ying-keung's two Chinese articles include "Privacy in Hong Kong: Concept and Empirical Analysis" and "Privacy in the Family: Its Hierarchical and Asymmetric Nature". He analyzed the data from two empirical surveys in order to clarify (1) the privacy orientations of Hong Kong Chinese; (2) their privacy consciousness; and (3) how to define privacy boundary. The subjects of these two surveys were all Hong Kong Chinese. The former survey was conducted in the form of questionnaire, while the latter was conducted by way of in-depth interview.

open-ended questions in interviews. Chan (2001) indicates that the data obtained from the in-depth interviews can clearly show the social network, social contacts, and nature of the contacts of the interviewees. Questions about the object of discussion of important issues, of consultation when making important choices, and of pouring out pent-up grievances, etc., all help us understand the boundary of personal information and its permeability.

As my social network is not wide, I first contacted interviewees of the younger generation to whom I was introduced by friends, and then interviewed their parents through them. Owing to the difficulty of finding interviewees, I could not interview enough individuals in the same place. The interviewees lived, respectively, in Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Foshan, China. Although these three places are geographically different from one another, they are all located in Guangdong Province. These are all better developed cities on the Chinese mainland. They are more developed in terms of industrialization, modernization, and commercialization. Their living standards are higher than those of other cities, and they provide more opportunity to find information on privacy through the media. During the interviews, some people, upon learning the nature of the questions, rejected my request to interview their parents, on the grounds that their parents “will refuse to answer,” or their parents “will not be able to understand.” So, some of the interviews have failed to involve the whole family. With the consent of the interviewees, the contents of the interviews were first recorded and then transcribed. Each interview lasted from 40 min to one hour, depending on individual cases.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Because some of the interviewees had to work and their schedule was not changeable, some of the interviews were conducted over the telephone, including Case 10, Case 11, and Case 12. When I wanted supplementary information from the interviewees, I mostly obtained it over the phone. The duration of each interview was from 20 to 30 minutes. And each interviewee was interviewed two to three times.

The subject of study here is, of course, the family. But, owing to the difficulty of finding interviewees, only 12 people were eventually interviewed. Most of the interviewees belonged to the younger generation—there were nine of them. Three belonged to the parental generation, including Cases 2, 3, and 5. Among the nine interviewees of the younger generation, there were two post-secondary institute students and seven university students. To sum up, the interviewees (especially the younger generation) came from two different types of family—“one-child” families (including Cases 4 and 9) and “non-one-child” families. Interviewees from different types of family may differ to a certain extent in terms of establishing the boundaries of privacy. This is also where this chapter stands out from other Hong Kong studies—in reflecting the unique situation of the Chinese mainland under the one-child policy.

During the interviews, quite a few interviewees were suspicious, doubtful, and evasive. For example, Case 4 (Ah Lui) said, “This is a family matter which is not supposed to be disclosed. Some things have developed since childhood...” When the interviewees subsequently learnt that the purpose of the interview was to locate the boundaries of privacy rather than pry into specific family secrets, they became less evasive.

Although this chapter is based on Chan’s research, the two researches are not identical in terms of sampling, categorization of questions, and contents. So when the Chinese mainland is compared with Hong Kong, total correspondence is not guaranteed. In particular, concerning the fourth sub-section (demarcation of privacy boundary) in the analysis section, this study is rather different from Chan’s study in respect of the contents of the questions. For example, unlike Chan’s study, this chapter asks the interviewees about those with whom they share confidences, and discuss relationship problems. So it is very difficult to make a comparison. Nonetheless, because of geographical proximity, this chapter still hopes to compare the Chinese mainland with Hong Kong in relation to other questions.

## Development of Privacy in China

In China the notion of privacy emerged later than in the West; the reason for this is closely connected with the social structure of China. According to Li (2002), privacy consists of private activities and interactive space based on the independent personality of the individual, and the claim to personal space is also an act of demarcation. In the traditional Chinese family, family members as individuals are completely attached to the family without any sense of freedom and independence. Under such circumstances, private territory cannot possibly be formed. Since New China was established, many things have been taken care of by the State. The individual's birth, aging, sickness, death, work, and other arrangements of life, such as marriage, travel, and burial, have been handled by the unit. The unit satisfied the needs of the individual, making it impossible for the sense of freedom and self-awareness of the individual to fully develop. The planned economy also rendered the information flow of the country stagnant. Under the influence of the social conditions, cultural traditions, and political and economic systems, the concept of private territory did not develop in China.

Along with the country's move towards a market economy, the responsibility of the unit for handling various kinds of social welfare is gradually being handed back to society. In the past, people's living circle was inseparable from the unit, and the social networks of the two parties could overlap and the development of the individual's sense of privacy was also suppressed. In contrast, after the reform and opening up, the mobility of people and information has greatly increased. Many things, such as study and work, have to be done outside the family. Every person has the opportunity to build up private networks outside the family, which may belong exclusively to the individual. As a result, the heterogeneousness of individuals becomes highly invisible and the individual's self-awareness is gradually emerging, prompting the pursuit of individual space. The development of information technology increasingly threatens the confidentiality of personal and even collective information, and the issue of privacy is thus widely discussed.

## Analysis of Interview Data

### The Interviewees' Views About Privacy

Because of socio-cultural differences and discrepancies in personal subjective views, privacy has all along wanted a clear definition. A definite part of the personal view is influenced by the traditional culture of society. And social behavior connected with privacy is also constrained by social norms (Chan 2001). Along with the increasing openness of Chinese society, the concept of privacy is naturally entering Chinese society in the form of "imported goods." All the interviewees indicated that they had mostly heard or read about privacy from Hong Kong media. Granted this common objective environment, the interviewees' understanding of privacy still had a subjective side:

Case 6 (Ah Wing): "Personal information, data and love affairs may all fall within the range of privacy. What can be made known may just be confined to a small select group of people.... This will be decided by the individual."

Case 8 (Ah Kwan): "Everybody understands privacy differently. Its range may only be understood by oneself but not by others.... The individual has the right to decide whether to make it public or not, and privacy varies with time and environment...."

From the above it can be seen that most of the interviewees thought that privacy is something "personal," though they seldom mentioned terms like "boundary" or "demarcation." In fact, their statements included this concept, for the opening or closing of the privacy boundary is decided by the individual. The area enclosed by the privacy boundary varies from person to person. This is then a selective act.

### Privacy Orientation

The interviewees were asked questions about states of privacy, including solitude, intimacy, reserve, household privacy, escape, anonymity, etc. Some of the interviewees' views were as follows:

Case 5 (Ah Han): "I love solitude .... I have never thought of staying far away from my friends and



relatives. How can you stay away? Do you mean to say that you can be absent when your friends and relatives meet?"

Case 6 (Ah Wing): "I often think about solitude, because solitude means possession of one's own personal space. But one cannot stay alone permanently. It's necessary to associate with people ...."

Case 10 (Ah Fai): "This depends on my mood. When I am in a bad mood and don't want to talk, I would like to stay away (from friends and relatives). As regards anonymity, I think only public figures have this problem."

From the above it can be seen that the Chinese (especially the younger generation) prioritized solitude, intimacy, and reserve, while anonymity was seldom mentioned. They seldom thought in terms of staying away or running away from friends and relatives. Many interviewees indicated they "often spend time alone," and solitude does allow for "relieving emotions," in that the individual can do what he or she wants to do without being influenced by society. To some extent, it is an expression of personal autonomy. Concerning the issue of "escaping from friends and relatives," more than half of the interviewees thought that friends and relatives are "inescapable." These findings are similar to Chan's finding that Hong Kong Chinese are inclined towards solitude rather than anonymity, but that mainland Chinese do not attach so much importance to household privacy (control of household space) as Hong Kong Chinese.

Case 1 (Ah Lai): "We use things at home equally and seldom fight over them..."

Case 2 (Ah Ho): "Sometimes the family fight over the television. I usually give way to my children. There's only one television set at home. It doesn't matter if I don't watch it."

Case 10 (Ah Fai): "Whether or not I have a room of my own is not a very important issue for me. Four years of living in the college dormitory has accustomed me to group life."

As far as household privacy (control of household space) is concerned, the congested living environment of the city makes Hong Kong people want to control household space, while most of the mainland interviewees indicated that they did not feel their home was congested. The household environment probably influences the individual's ideas about the control of household space. A congested environment may make the

individual feel cramped and want more personal space. By contrast, the more personal space the individual owns in the family, the less he or she wants to control the household space.

## Consciousness of Right of Privacy

With respect to the two questions of opening private letters and entering one's room, the interviewees had the following views:

Case 2 (Ah Wai): "I would never open my children's letters. This is to do with respect for other people. I only read what they show me. Both parties should be sensitive to such issues.... I seldom close my door at home. Nothing to hide. We are one family; there is "no need to close the door."

Case 8 (Ah Kwan): "I think the family opening one's letters is not an act of violation of privacy, for the contents of the letters seldom involve privacy. Private things are talked about, not written. Even if they really open my letters, I don't mind if they read the contents.... The members of my family are not in the habit of knocking on the door. Maybe it is because the previous home was very basic. And I live alone now, so knocking on the door or not is no longer an issue."

Even though there were interviewees who indicated that even if their personal letters are opened by their family, they "don't mind much," or "it is forgivable," this was actually because they thought the contents involved have not much to do with privacy (i.e., they are "no big deal").

Moreover, the interviewees attached importance to personal space. Most of the interviewees thought that their family members do not have the right to enter their personal space (i.e., their room). This can be seen from the fact that they expected their family to "knock on the door before entering the room." However, Hong Kong Chinese attach more importance to personal letters than do mainland Chinese. This may be due to differences in the definition of the range and contents of privacy between the two communities.

In addition, all the interviewees indicated that their family members have the right to know with whom they associate and the progress of their studies. In respect of personal finance, all the interviewees thought that their family have the right to learn about their personal finances.

## Demarcation of Privacy Boundary

The interviewees were asked about the issue of sharing personal information, including details of their daily life (such as health, diet), studies, work, friendships, and affairs of the heart, etc. They often mentioned people outside the family and shared different matters with different family members. As Chan (2000) puts it, the boundaries between family members are hierarchically different from each other. However, because of differences in categorization, this chapter cannot make comparison with Chan's study regarding every domain.

In respect of everyday life, because it does not involve any privacy range (except for the interviewees of Case 7 and Case 9, who indicated that their family members took so much care of them that they felt restricted), the interviewees mainly talked to, and communicated with, members of the family. Boundary permeability between family members is very high. Parents, children, and siblings share with each other with no obvious difference. The situation is two-way.

In respect of their studies, all interviewees indicated that their family members have the right to know how they are getting on.

When experiencing problems with their studies, the interviewees tended to discuss these with people outside their family (especially schoolmates). This is natural and reasonable and in compliance with the principle of proximity, for schoolmates are their learning partners; they may be facing the same problems, and they may find it easier to understand each other in discussion. Parents, on the other hand, "are unable to understand" where the problems lie.

Case 9 (Ah Chu): "I talk to schoolmates about study problems because we spend so much time together. Also, it is easier for those of us who study together to understand. This does not mean that I deliberately conceal these from my parents. But even if I do tell them about such problems, they will not be able to understand or help."

In respect of work, interviewees who were in employment indicated that they would disclose things about their work to their family, but, when encountering work problems, they would

mainly discuss them with people outside the family. There were still interviewees, however, who would talk or complain about them to their family.

Case 6 (Ah Wing): "I would discuss work problems with my father. After all, he has been going out to work for years, so it is easier for him to understand. Sometimes, I also talk to my cousin. On the other hand, maybe because of her education and the social background of her life, I seldom discuss these matters with my mother."

In respect of friendship, all interviewees indicated that their family have the right to know about the people they associate with. But where problems with friends are involved, although the interviewees may talk to their family (such as Cases 1, 6, and 11), family members are just some of the many persons they talk to. Many turned mainly to close friends and lovers instead:

Case 4 (Ah Lui): When there are problems, I do not talk to my family. In particular, I have nothing in common with my father. I talk to close friends or my girl friend. If I fall out with friend A, I talk to friend B and friend C.

In respect of emotional relationships, the interviewees generally would disclose to their family the status quo of an affair, but some of them stated that in fact they were not very willing to disclose it to their family (for example, Case 10 and Case 12). The interviewees indicated that usually it is their parents who are most concerned about their relationships. In most cases, they would only disclose it when asked by their parents, and, of course, they could be evasive:

Case 10 (Ah Fai): "I do not think my family have the right to know about my relationships. In fact, such things are none of their business and I seldom speak about them of my own accord."

Case 12 (Ah Miu): "I don't think it is necessary to tell (the parents). I am just dating rather than getting married. It is unnecessary to explain too much. I will talk if my parents ask me, but it won't be in great detail."

Some other interviewees take the initiative in disclosing to their family the state of their relationships. For example, Case 7 (Ah Nam) thought that falling in love is the turning point of her life, about which her parents have the right to know.

Whether the interviewees disclose the status quo of their personal relationships to their family (especially their parents) of their own accord or passively, they seldom—or never—tell their family about the problems they are experiencing in a relationship (except for Case 1). Sharing it with siblings is even rarer.

As far as relationships are concerned, marked boundaries appear between the interviewee and different family members and form a hierarchical pattern. Individuals will disclose to their family the status quo of a love affair (either of their own accord or passively). But the objects of disclosure are mainly parents rather than siblings. It can thus be seen that a greater right to information is granted to the parents than to siblings. So asymmetrical relationships still exist in modern families, leading to asymmetry in information flow. It may be taken for granted that Party A will obtain information from Party B, while the other way round is regarded as a violation of privacy (Chan 2001).

With respect to affairs of the heart, the boundary between the individual and the family is also completely closed. Most of the interviewees thought that a love affair is “something between two people,” and what the family are concerned about is the result rather than the process. Just as Hu Chenghui (2000) says, the decline of the role played by the family in the economy as a result of social changes has made the family concentrate more on emotional satisfaction. This emotional satisfaction may involve only sharing of personal joy or seeking the family’s opinions regarding important issues. Nonetheless, the family is still very important in the mind of the interviewees:

Case 6 (Ah Wing): “The familial relationship will remain unchanged for life. One’s family is after all a group of people to whom one is very close, but one cannot possibly tell one’s family every minute detail of one’s daily life and they may not necessarily be interested in every matter, either.”

From the above it can be seen that the interviewees do not fail to attach importance to family. Possibly, they just regard family as a haven for the individual psyche. When they encounter problems or unhappiness, the family will make them feel warm and safe. They do not necessarily

want to tell their family about their problems. It is already enough that they have a home to go. This may be because the interviewees think that “it won’t be much help” to tell their family or they think that they “will not be interested.” Instead, when confronted with relationship problems, they will talk to close friends, because friends feel sympathetic to them. And men less than women confide in others about their love affairs. This may be connected with traditional gender stereotypes, which make men unable to express their personal feelings freely.

In respect of joy sharing, the objects of the interviewees include people outside the family. And what is shared most with family is funny anecdotes from daily life. The other objects of sharing include friends (both close and casual), schoolmates, colleagues, lovers, etc. This finding is also very similar to Chan’s.

When it comes to articulating grievances, the interviewees tended to select people outside the family, such as friends and lovers:

Case 4 (Ah Lui): “I may talk to my family about certain matters, but not necessarily about my moods (certain feelings). Usually I find some way to vent (my unhappiness), and would only contact my friends or girlfriend when it does not work.”

Although some of the interviewees would express their grievances to their family, how much is disclosed is selective. In addition, the female interviewees tend to complain to friends more than the male interviewees do. The men tend to try to solve the problem on their own first. This may again be related to gender stereotypes. If a man seeks emotional support from people whenever there is a problem, he may lose their respect.

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## Conclusion

Privacy undoubtedly exists in Chinese families, that it is just a question of degree. Although the understanding of privacy varies from person to person, the interviewees generally think that privacy is something personal or individual, which is related to the Chinese preference for solitude and reserve.

When the individual seeks solitude and reserve, they seldom consider staying far away from friends and relatives, which is closely related to the emphasis laid on family by Chinese tradition. Chan (2001) thinks that there is no conflict or contradiction between the two forms of privacy, intimacy and reserve, because different times, objects, and occasions are involved. In fact, intimacy and reserve are only relative to each other. Inside the privacy circle, it is intimacy; outside it is reserve. The interviewees seldom think about the issue of anonymity; nor do they attach importance to it.

It can thus be seen that mainland and Hong Kong Chinese also have what the West calls the privacy states of solitude, intimacy, and reserve, but that the issue of anonymity is not a high priority.

In respect of privacy, the interviewees obviously take the individual as the boundary of privacy for personal letters and rooms. Not only people outside the family cannot cross the boundary, but even family members can only set foot in this domain with "personal permission." The individual gives their family a high degree of openness in respect of other rights such as knowledge about personal finances and companions.

In addition, they will share happy feelings with their family, but when encountering unhappiness, the interviewees (especially those of the younger generation) tend to pour out their grievances to people outside the family. This differs from Chan's finding that Hong Kong Chinese tend to pour out their feelings of sorrow and joy to their family. The discrepancy may be due to different sampling in the two studies.<sup>5</sup> However, behind the difference in the object of complaining, there may be the same reason. Chan's study finds that Hong Kong Chinese would often discuss problems with and share their joys and pains with their family, partly because of the influence of traditional Chinese thought. It can thus be seen that for Hong Kong Chinese, family is still a unit

of intimacy. Certain privacy domains are still usually demarcated, with the family as the dividing line, showing that the Chinese attach importance to the family and its intimate relationships (Chan 2001).

Similarly, the reason why the interviewees tend not to pour out their grievances to their family is mainly because they "do not want their family to worry." This is also a manifestation of laying stress on family, because they proceed from consideration of the feelings of their family. In respect of this issue, we can say that mainland Chinese are similar to Hong Kong Chinese despite their differences.

Because the majority of the interviewees are single persons (altogether 9), the privacy range inside the family usually involves parents and siblings, instead of spouses. The privacy boundary between husband and wife is most open. They will discuss matters with each other. This is followed by that between parent and child, and then by that between siblings. Children's space for their parents to get involved and share their personal information is much larger than that of parents for their children. And children's space for the father is less than that for the mother. The individual's room for siblings to get involved is more or less the same as that for parents, but the individual less frequently allows siblings to intrude into their emotional relationships. Here, an obvious hierarchical structure is manifested.

In traditional Chinese culture, the family's core foundation is patriarchy. The relationships between father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brothers are not symmetrical. It is taken for granted that the one in the superior position may obtain information of the one in the inferior position. And the reverse is regarded as offensive (Chan 2001). This explains why children have more available space for their parents than parents have for the children, for the individual's role or status in the family determines different rights and obligations.

Although the permeability of the privacy boundary between parent and child is higher than that between siblings, we can see that in the modern Chinese family, the hierarchical boundary between parent and child is no longer as clear-cut

<sup>5</sup>Chan's study is based on the results of 414 questionnaires and 21 in-depth interviews. My chapter is an exploration of privacy based on a small number of in-depth interviews. The two studies are naturally different.

as in the past. Nonetheless, the influence and authority of parents still exist. Even concerning things children do not want to talk about (such as the state of a romantic relationship), they will still tell when asked by their parents. Nonetheless, children now have more right to negotiate with their family. For instance, from the request that the parents knock on the door before entering the child's room, it can be seen that the problem of children living with parents can be solved through negotiation. Of course, there are examples of successful negotiation (for instance, Case 7 successfully requested the mother to knock on the door before entry). There are also counter-examples (for instance, for the time being, Case 4 cannot do anything about the fact that the parents are still able to open the door with a key when it is locked). But compared with traditional families, the intergenerational relationship has already been developing from vertical to horizontal.

Although the Chinese still attach importance to familial relationships, the importance of schoolmates, friends, lovers, etc., keeps rising. This is a result of societal change, greater social openness, and the changes in family functions to provide freedom for people in different respects, such as career and choice of friends.

Judging by the situation in China, modernization and urbanization have brought changes to people's ideas and family structure. Because of regional and individual differences in the implementation of the policy of birth control, up till now in China, two types of family, namely, one-child and non-one-child, still exist. The difference between these two types of family lies in the fact that children of one-child families do not have siblings to discuss matters with, to share joys and sorrows with, and to complain to. If both family and friends occupy an important position in the range of personal privacy, children of one-child families have two major objects: family members (parents) and people outside the family (especially friends).

If the parent-child relationship is relatively close, the permeability of the boundary between parent and child is naturally high. On the other hand, without other siblings, the individual's behavior in choosing people outside the family as

the object with whom to discuss matters becomes "justified." Unfortunately, owing to the limitations of the data, this cannot be analyzed comparatively. As judged from the existing data, one-child or not, the individual (of the children's generation), when confronted with relationship problems or unhappiness, tends mostly to talk to people outside the family. In one-child families, the relationship between females and their parents is closer than that between males and their parents (Case 4).

From this it can be seen that the demarcation behavior of the individual manifests the differentiated pattern proposed by Fei Xiaotong (1992). The social relationships of the individual are extended outwards layer by layer according to the degree of closeness, which explains why privacy circles are usually centered upon family and friends. In the eyes of the young and single generation, the lover also occupies an important position. This proves that the demarcation of privacy is not based on family (Chan 2001). While interpersonal relations do influence the privacy boundary, the ability to understand also results in the emergence of different boundaries. Privacy represents the interactive process of information sharing. In the family, the resistance to communication may be due to the so-called "generation gap" or "intergenerational conflict." For example, the younger generation think that their parents "cannot understand" their personal relationship and friendship problems, that they have "no common language" with their parents, that their "ways of thinking are not the same." These then affect the interflow of communication.

As a matter of fact, we cannot deny that in the eyes of the Chinese, family is still important to a certain extent. This is confirmed by the interviewees' choosing to discuss important issues with their family. However, they think that their family members attach more importance to the result than to the process. This may be a manifestation of inadequate communication between the two generations. Unfortunately, owing to the limited number of interviewees of the parental generation, this cannot be further explored in this chapter. In modern society, people are busy with their own business, and the time spent by the individual



at home is becoming reduced. It is simply impossible to tell what is happening to the other family members. It is the end result that the family members start to attach importance to. Provided that the status quo of the children is "all right," the family members are "at ease." Or else contemporary parents already realize that the children cannot be "monitored too much," or "cannot be monitored at all," so they only care about the end result.

Moreover, the interviewees "do not want their family to worry" about them, and they think that there are matters which "their family cannot understand." As a result, they seek out people outside the family to communicate with. It can thus be seen that the boundary in between is not necessarily deliberately drawn. While emotional relationships are a topic which the individual tends to avoid discussing, the others are mostly due to communication problems. We do not deny that certain matters cannot be understood unless one has had some personal experience of them. If the other party cannot understand the matter, which, if disclosed, will only increase the family's concern without solving the problem, reticence is a better choice. The existence of privacy inside the family does not mean that familial relationships are compromised, nor is it necessarily bad. For example, maintaining privacy could be an indication of alienation as well as a sign of intimacy (attaching importance to family). However, this kind of intimacy refers to the individual regarding their family as people close to them, and is different from intimacy as a situation of privacy.

Societal changes diminish the functions of the family. The private network of the individual in the modern family is characterized by diversity. Viewing the demarcation performance of the interviewees in respect of privacy, family members are still the main object with whom the individual shares their joy. But the expressive function of the family is lower than the help offered by close friends when unhappiness or other problems like those in personal love affairs and friendships arise. That is to say the ability of the family to dispel unhappy emotions for the individual is relatively low. On this level, friends and lovers seem to be more important than family. This is rather different from Chan's finding that when

experiencing unhappiness, Hong Kong Chinese will talk to members of their family.

The privacy consciousness of mainland Chinese is not so strong as that of Hong Kong Chinese. In China, a developing country, the concept of privacy is still in the early stages, so that consciousness of it is weak and vague. In terms of the protection of personal privacy, the Chinese mainland has not yet developed an adequate way to clearly define people's rights. As a result, people do not expect much in respect of the protection of personal privacy and would not place certain matters in the domain of privacy (for example, there are interviewees who think that private letters do not come into that domain). And naturally, they would not feel their privacy is being violated. This is due to differences in individual subjective understanding. Nonetheless, we cannot deny that the Chinese do not have the key privacy element that is found in the West. In the eyes of the Chinese, the unit of privacy is the individual or the group. The individual is determined by the zone of privacy which surrounds him and the person with whom information is shared. This involves privacy at the level of the individual, the inside of the family, and the life lived in public (such as career and circle of friends). Part of the internal privacy of the family is gradually entering the range of discussion at the social and public level, such as family disputes and domestic violence. It is also possible for privacy at the social and public level to become part of information sharing within the family. The range of privacy can cross the boundary of family.

To sum up, mainland Chinese prioritize the privacy of solitude, intimacy, and reserve, while anonymity is not highly prized. These priorities are basically not very different from those of Hong Kong Chinese—it is just that Hong Kong Chinese attach more importance to household privacy.

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## Age and Gender Differences in Chinese-Filipino Parent- Adolescent Conflict, Family Cohesion and Autonomy

Rosa C. Shao

The family is the social institution that is every child's first school of learning. Many factors may affect a person, but the fact is that everyone starts and ends with the family, where most of a child's experiences with life transitions take place. One of those transitions, the lengthened period in which the transition to adulthood occurs, is the adolescence stage, wherein critical changes occur in the biological, cognitive, social, and psychological development of the child, leading to some adjustments in the parent-adolescent relationship. Varying levels of parent-adolescent conflict and family cohesion are considered a primary source of familial distress and psychological maladjustment. Conflict arises as adolescents seek to demand autonomous decision-making rights and parents seek to curb or grant them as they deem right.

### Second-Individuation Process

Adolescence compasses one phase of heightened activity for most youth in the intra-psychoic juggling act of defining a balance between that which is taken to be self and that which is considered to be other. In the psychodynamic theory espoused by (Blos 1967), adolescence is regarded as a second-individuation experience. The parent-adolescent

conflict is seen, as part of autonomy development or the "second individuation process," termed by Blos, that takes place as the young person develops a clearer sense of self as psychologically separate from the parents. Conflicts with parents facilitate the process.

Current research provides evidence that conflict can function constructively when it occurs within the subjective conditions of trust and closeness and their behavioral expressions (Montemayor 1983; Steinberg 1990; Daniels 1990). Families with a strong foundation of trust will be likely to negotiate the transition with relatively little cost, opening up even more daily discussion in egalitarian terms as parents are more willing to adopt a reciprocal relationship to accommodate the fast-growing young adult. Family connectedness is presumed to be an important factor in the outcome of adolescent development (Noller and Callan 1986; Newman 1989). The prevailing portrait of parent-adolescent relationships has moved from an emphasis on an inevitable estrangement to a view that families adjust and transform to accommodate the fast-maturing adolescent (e.g., Steinberg 1984, 1988; Collins 1990; Lauren and Collins 1994; Peña 2001).

### The Chinese-Filipino Community in the Philippines

Numerous studies have been done in examining the nature of conflict, cohesion, and autonomy level of Caucasian families. Yet there is little

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empirical research on family conflict, cohesion, and autonomy studies among Asian families, specifically, the Chinese-Filipino families. To cite a few of those Asian studies involving the Chinese families, e.g., Ruth K. Chao (1994), Ho (1986, 1989), and Ho and Kang (1984), most of them dealt with Chinese parenting and child-rearing attitudes. The focus on Chinese-Filipino adolescents as the main subjects for this study is quite a challenge because, as Silverberg and Gondoli (1996) mentioned, “the goal of a primarily autonomous self could not be as easily said of Asian Americans.” One wonders whether adolescents of Chinese ethnicity would even show evidence of such autonomy issues, given that their upbringing in the home emphasizes familial relationship of harmony, respect for elders and Confucian teachings, upholding “five human relationships,” *wu-lun*, namely: emperor–subject, father–son, husband–wife, elder brother–younger brother, and friend–friend (Wonohadidjojo 2004).

### Conflict: Frequency and Resolution

Conflict suggests an inability to resolve differences, sometimes accompanied by tension, hostility, or aggression (Jaffe 1998). Intense conflict occurs when adolescents’ desire for freedom clashes with parental attempts to regulate their behavior. Conflict can be operationalized as “disagreement” (Smetana 1989, 1995) or discussion with parents that may be about major issues or decisions, or may be about everyday responsibilities, like doing the house chores. Many studies indicated small to moderate increases in parent-adolescent relationship and changes in family cohesion across different adolescence stages (Fuligni 1998; Lung 1999).

Some researchers have found that parent-adolescent conflict peaks in early adolescence and then subsides (Montemayor 1983; Steinberg 1988) during the transitional stage. Smetana (1989) reported that 35 % of parent-adolescent conflicts were with mothers alone and 14 % were with fathers alone. Smetana (1989) found that in a sample of fifth through twelfth graders, there were few age differences in verbal reports

of most types of parent-adolescent conflict. Preadolescents reported having more conflicts with fathers than did early, mid-, and late adolescents. Conflicts over homework and academic achievement peaked in early adolescence coinciding with the transition from elementary to middle school. Conflicts over chores were more frequent among families with mid- and late adolescents.

Other research looking into conflict issues and domains have found that conflict in specific domains may show increases, no change, or decreases (Galambos and Almeida 1992). In fact, research indicated unclear, unspecified, or even non-significant age and gender effects (Yau and Smetana 1996; Lung 1999). With regard to gender in parent-adolescent conflict, most research has asserted that conflicts generated with girls are greater than that with boys, and that more disagreements are with mothers than fathers, and that boys are attuned to their mothers’ reasoning and would adopt their conventional perspectives on conflict (Montemayor 1983; Smetana 1989; Smetana and Asquith 1994). However cross-cultural and ethnic research has not pointed strongly toward a gender-specific outcome. In Lung’s study (1999), contrary to expectations, results showed no significant gender differences in parent-adolescent conflict between Chinese American females who had one or more brothers, and those who only had sisters. This result was the same for the American families in her study.

Lung (1999) also found significant differences in conflict resolutions between Chinese Americans and Caucasian families. Chinese American families used more avoidance, guilt and shaming, and severe physical aggression, whereas Caucasian families used more verbal reasoning and obliging strategies.

### Cohesion

Adolescents’ perception of family cohesion, or closeness of familial relationships, may be a crucial factor that serves to determine the occurrence

and intensity of their conflicts with parents. Noller and Callan (1986) compared parental and adolescent perceptions of family cohesion and adaptability, with findings indicating that parents viewed the family as more cohesive than did adolescents, except in the case of the youngest age group; in fact the lowest perceptions of cohesiveness were among the older age groups. As to the level of adaptability, the adolescents viewed their current family as less adaptable than did parents, although this seemed to be influenced by the sex of the child, because the 13-year-old females reported being dissatisfied with family flexibility but not the 13-year-old males, and the 15-year-old males reported greater dissatisfaction than did females of same age group.

Barnes and Olson (1985) used the circumplex model on parent-adolescent communication in getting parents' and adolescents' reports. They did not find sex differences between adolescent males and adolescent females in how they perceived their communication with their parents, or how parents of either sex perceived their communication with them.

An important indigenous notion of parental control for Chinese is known as *guan*, meaning "to govern." It has a very positive connotation among Chinese, because it can mean "to care for" or "to love" as well as "to govern." For the Chinese families, parental care, concern, and involvement are synonymous with a firm control and governance of the child. Studies with empirical support for the different meanings of parental control among Asians demonstrated positive associations between dimensions of parental control and warmth. For instance, parents' ratings of family cohesion or closeness were positively correlated with their control among Japanese, but negatively correlated among Americans (Chao and Tseng 2002). A study of older Hong Kong Chinese adolescents found that *guan* was strongly and positively associated with warmth and was weakly associated with restrictive/hostile control. Thus, the concept of *guan* may overlap somewhat with restrictive control, but it is also distinct from restriction or domination of children. For these Chinese adolescents, *guan* even has positive

connotation for them, as it was positively associated with their perceptions of parental warmth (Yau and Smetana 1996; Chao and Tseng 2002).

## The Cultural Context of Autonomy

People from individualistic Western cultures view autonomy quite differently from collectivistic Eastern societies (Chao 1994, 2001; Yeh et al. 2003; Yeh 2004). Autonomy emphasized in Western culture often refers to a manner of self-sovereignty, demanding separation from parental ideas and valuing individual independence. In contrast, in Asian or Eastern cultures, like the Chinese-Filipino society, a kind of family-sovereignty autonomy that upholds the value of harmonious interdependence may prevail. Studies do point to gender differences in autonomy levels (Steinberg and Silverberg 1986; Lamborn and Steinberg 1993).

A study that also seems to accurately capture the two domains of individuation and connectedness in adolescent autonomy is the one undertaken by Yeh and colleagues (Yeh et al. 2003; Yeh 2004). Yeh and colleagues looked into cross-cultural autonomy development among the Chinese adolescents from Taiwan, tapping into the East Asian culture of family-sovereignty, wherein harmonious interdependence is highly promoted. Yeh et al. (2003) proposed two orientations of autonomous development for the Chinese youth:

*Individuating autonomy* shows a capacity for specifying independent self-identity options, making independent self-identity decisions, and defining independent self-identity goals with a confident and meaningful feeling in those choices and goals, and the strategies developed to achieve these goals. *Relating autonomy* shows a capacity for specifying interdependent self-identity options, making interdependent self-identity decisions, and defining interdependent self-identity goals with a feeling of identification and meaningfulness, as well as developing strategies to achieve these goals. (p. 9)

Thus, each dimension of autonomy has its three aspects of cognitive, emotional, and functional dimensions, calling for self-determination in independent self-identity development as well as interdependent self-identity.



## The Present Study

This chapter is part of a three-series article presentation given during 42nd, 43rd, and 44th annual convention of the Psychological Association of the Philippines, respectively. The whole study comes from the author's dissertation, *Chinese-Filipino Adolescents' Developing Autonomy in the Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Family Cohesion*. This first series focused on the univariate analysis of all the variables in this study. It attempted to distinguish dimensions of conflict, particularly, conflict frequency, and resolution style, family cohesion, and adolescents' two orientations of autonomy, across adolescent age and gender. Another important objective for this study was to see whether the two orientations of individuating and relating autonomy do exist among the Chinese-Filipino adolescents.

The initial three research questions and their corresponding hypotheses were as follows:

1. Are there age differences in parent-adolescent conflict, and family cohesion, among Chinese-Filipino adolescents?
2. Are there gender differences in parent-adolescent conflict, and family cohesion, among Chinese-Filipino adolescents?
3. What is the level of Chinese-Filipino adolescents' individuating autonomy? What is the level of Chinese-Filipino adolescents' relating autonomy? Is there a significant difference in the two types of autonomy across age and gender?

The hypotheses were:

1. With regards to age, parent-adolescent conflict will be higher, family cohesion will be lower for the younger Chinese-Filipino adolescents.
2. No predictions are proposed with regards to gender differences in the level of parent-adolescent conflict and family cohesion among Chinese-Filipino adolescents due to mixed findings from the literature.
3. Overall, Chinese-Filipino adolescents' individuating autonomy will be lower than relating autonomy. With regards to age, the level of Chinese-Filipino adolescents' individuating autonomy and relating autonomy will be higher for older Chinese-Filipino adolescents; with regards to gender, Chinese-Filipino

adolescent boys will be higher in individuating autonomy and girls will be higher in their relating autonomy.

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## Method

### Participants

This study utilized a cross-sectional design involving Chinese-Filipino adolescents residing in the high school vicinity of Chinatown at Metro-Manila City, Philippines. They were classified under four age groups, comprising both males and females: the preadolescents (sixth graders, about 11- to 12-year-olds), the early adolescents (second-year high school students, about 13- to 15-year-olds), the middle adolescents (fourth-year high school students, about 16- to 18-year-olds), and the late adolescents (college students, about 19- to 21-years olds). The year-levels of the adolescents were the basis for age distinction. A total of 324 Chinese-Filipino adolescent students, randomly sampled from the three local Chinese-Filipino high schools and one Chinese-Filipino college, comprised the survey sample. The term "Chinese-Filipino adolescents" denotes adolescents whose ethnicity satisfied the two main criteria in the operational definition of the description, *Chinese-Filipino*, which are as follows: "holding Filipino citizenship, and with either one or both parents being Chinese by blood." Table 28.1 shows the number of participants across age and gender. This study does not intend to look into the generational status of the participants. However, for purpose of clarification to those interested to know the distinction, adolescents whose parents being born in China would be called first generational youth; and those with either one parent born in the Philippines, would be looked upon as second or third generational youth.

## Measures

### Parent-Adolescent Conflict

Conflict, in terms of frequency and resolution, was the main predictor variable in this study, whereas family cohesion represented the moderating

**Table 28.1** Number of participants by schools, according to age and gender ( $N=324$ )

Designated school	Age group				Total
	Pre-adolescent	Early adolescent	Middle adolescent	Late adolescent	
School A	30	26	22		78
School B	26	25	25		76
School C	28	26	29		83
School D				87	87
Total	84	77	76	87	324
<i>Gender</i>					
Males	43	36	26	43	148
Females	41	41	50	44	176

variable. Smetana's social domain framework was used for conceptualizing family issues (Smetana 1989; Smetana and Asquith 1994), as well as the conflict issues generated from the preliminary mother-daughter focus group discussion. The constructed conflict scale contains two sections: conflict issues and conflict resolutions. The adolescent participants rated the 28 conflict issues individually with reference to each parent. Principal component analyses of the preliminary scale yield at least six conflict domains: Chores (e.g., helping around the house), Regulation of interpersonal activities (e.g., relating to opposite sex), Appearance (e.g., how you dress), Academic achievement (e.g., How well you do in school), Language used (e.g., speaking Chinese at home), and Substance Use (e.g., drinking alcohol). The participants rated how often they disagreed about each issue with their father and mother over the past month on a 4-point scale.

The scale ranges from never (0 times), to seldom (1–3 times), to usually (4–6 times), and always (7 or more times). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of this preliminary measure for the pretest sample was 0.94. For the actual sample, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability was 0.89 and 0.86, accounting for conflict with mothers and conflict with fathers, respectively. Cronbach's Alpha is a statistical technique used to compute the internal consistency of the scales; score below 0.5 is considered low.

The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory–Self, contains 16 conflict resolution items, assessing each adolescent's individual style of handling conflict with reference to each parent. Four styles

are included in the inventory: compliance (e.g., giving in and not defending one's position), withdrawal (e.g., refusing to discuss the issue further and tuning the parent out), conflictive engagement (e.g., personal attacks and losing control), and positive problem solving (e.g., compromise and negotiation). Scores are to be generated based on how frequently the adolescent used this strategy with father/mother on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) never to (5) always. The pretest with 63 students yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.72. Concurrent validity with the Conflict tactics scale (Lung 1999) has been established satisfactorily. The actual sample yielded Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities of 0.77 and 0.75 for conflict resolution with mothers and with fathers, respectively.

### Perceived Family Cohesion

Family cohesion tapped the adolescent's perception of family connectedness or closeness, because the context of a close-emotional relationship where conflict or disagreement can be aired out is positive for adolescent autonomy development. The study utilized the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES-III), designed to measure two dimensions of family functioning: cohesion and adaptability. The full scale is composed of two parts, one measuring actual perception and the other, ideal aspiration. For the purposes of this study, only the first part (actual perception) was used (Corcoran and Fischer 1994). FACES-III has only fair internal consistency, with an overall alpha of 0.68 for the total instrument, 0.77 for cohesion, and 0.62 for adaptability.

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of family cohesion in the pretest sample was 0.56 and 0.84 in the actual sample.

### Two-Orientation Adolescent Autonomy

This construct is seen as having two different orientations, the intra-individual level, known as individuating autonomy and the interpersonal level, known as relating autonomy. Each level comprises self-determination in thinking, feeling, and behaving. The present study utilized the Adolescent Autonomy Scale (AAS), consisting of 30 items, 15 measuring the extent of individuating autonomy and 15 measuring the extent of relating autonomy (Yeh et al. 2003). Each subscale includes items pertaining to thinking, feeling, and behaving aspects of autonomy. Some items tapping individuating autonomy are "I always have confidence in my own decisions," and "I know what I want." Items on relating autonomy includes: "When making decisions, I consider both my parents' and my own perspective," and "Even when I have my own ideas, I still consider my parents' suggestions in making up my mind." Participants responded on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Yeh et al. (2003) and Yeh (2004) did a confirmatory factor analysis to check the two-factor model of the AAS and found that the data did fit their two-factor model. There was a moderate 0.38 correlation between the two latent factors, indicating a positive orthogonal relationship. The reliabilities of the indicators of each latent variable were all well above 0.60. The pretest sample yielded a reliability of  $\alpha=0.87$  and  $\alpha=0.83$  was obtained in the actual sample.

## Procedure

### Preliminary Phase

In the first phase of the study, preliminary focus group discussions and pilot tests of instruments were conducted. Initially, two focus group discussions were conducted with a sample of Chinese-Filipino families to explore the nature of parent-adolescent relationships, parental standards and expectations, family cohesion, familial

values and openness to autonomy. The participants for these two focus group discussions consisted of 12 pairs of mother-daughter dyads comprising the first group and six pairs of parent-son dyads (either mother-son dyads or father-son dyads) for the second group. Both group members came from the couple fellowship of one local Chinese-Filipino church in Manila. The results of the FGDs and other pertinent empirical research (Smetana 1989; Smetana and Asquith 1994; Peña 2001) were the bases of a preliminary measure tapping into the kinds of issues relevant to the Chinese-Filipino adolescents' parent-adolescent conflict.

This conflict instrument, together with the measures of conflict resolution, family cohesion, and autonomy were pilot-tested to assess the appropriateness and validity of the testing instruments as well as the comprehensibility of the questions in the Chinese-Filipino setting. All measures were in English. Initial contacts with all the participating schools through formal letters, telephone calls, and personal visits indicated positive feedback and supportive cooperation from each school authority. The researcher carried out a randomized selection of participants by school.

The testing sessions were conducted in the participating school's classrooms. On the test date per se, all participants at said school were given a set of self-report instruments for group-administered testing. The order of the measures was randomly counterbalanced. The researcher conducted all the testing for all schools. The initial number of participants was 491, but the number was narrowed down to 333 after screening out those who do not live in two-parent households. Nine more participants with several blank responses were also taken out, making the final total of 324 participants.

## Results

### Univariate Analyses of Variables

The following are the results of the descriptive analyses for each of the variables in this study. The researcher was able to delineate adolescents'

conflict frequency and conflict resolution styles with each parent, as well as for each age group and gender.

### Frequency of Conflict with Parents

The frequency of conflict with each parent was measured according to participants' answers to the question, "In the past month, I have discussed/ disagreed with my mother/father about..." with regard to each of the 28 issues presented to them. Participants answered a 4-point scale, ranging from "0" (0 times) to "3" (7 or more times). A higher score signifies higher incidence of conflict.

The mean frequency of conflict with mother was computed for each age level of the respondents. Univariate analysis of variance showed significant differences in conflict incidence according to age only,  $F(3, 323) = 11.75, p < 0.01$ , but not between gender. The result showed no interactions between age and gender. Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons showed that the mean differences between preadolescents and the three higher age levels, namely, early, middle, and late adolescents, were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The preadolescents showed the highest frequency of conflict among the groups.

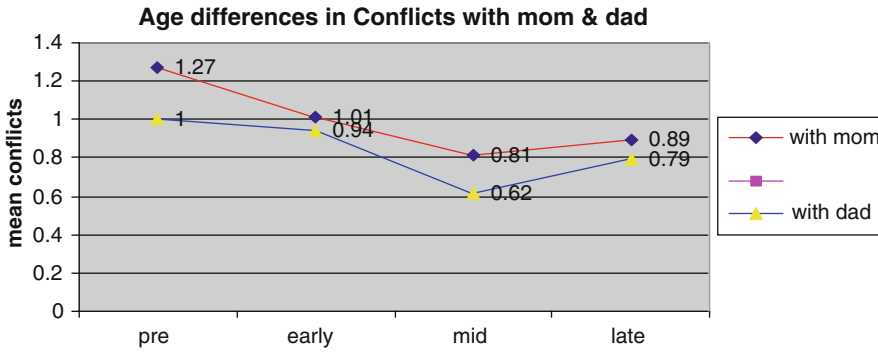
The mean frequency of conflict with father was computed for each age level of the respondents. Univariate analysis of variance showed significant differences in conflict incidence according to age,  $F(3, 323) = 8.38, p < 0.01$ , and also between males and females,  $F(1, 323) = 4.57, p < 0.05$ . Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons showed that the mean differences between preadolescents and middle and late adolescents were significant, wherein the preadolescent group indicated the highest frequency of conflict with father; another significant difference lay between the early adolescents as against the middle adolescents, wherein the middle adolescents showed the lesser frequency of conflict between the two groups. The mean score is higher for males than for females. No interactions between age and gender were found. Figure 28.1 shows the mean of conflict with mother and father according to age. Figure 28.2 shows significant gender difference in conflicts with dad. As hypothesized, the younger adolescents indicated higher frequency of conflicts with parents.

The distribution of scores for mother and father were both fairly normal, yet overall low levels of conflict were depicted. The overall mean scores for conflict with mother and with father were 1.00 ( $SD = 0.55$ ) and 0.84 ( $SD = 0.51$ ), respectively, or 1–3 times for each parent in the past month. A paired-sample  $t$ -test was done to determine differences in adolescents' frequency of conflict with mothers and fathers. The results show that the mean conflict scores with mother and father were significantly different with  $t(df) = 7.74, p < 0.01$ .

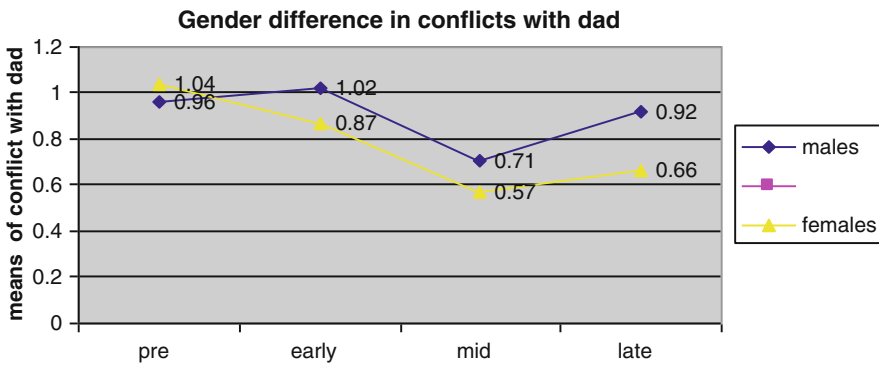
### Conflict Resolution with Parents

Adolescents indicated the frequency with which they applied particular conflict resolution styles with mother and father in times of disagreements, on a 5-point scale of 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Always"). The four styles of conflict resolution in this study are compliance, withdrawal, positive problem solving, and conflictive engagement. Total overall means for each conflict resolution style with mother, in descending order, were: Positive problem solving  $M = 2.98$  ( $SD = 0.89$ ), Compliance  $M = 2.57$  ( $SD = 0.71$ ), Withdrawal  $M = 2.29$  ( $SD = 0.79$ ), and Conflictive engagement  $M = 1.60$  ( $SD = 0.64$ ). Total overall means for each conflict resolution style with father, in descending order, were: Positive problem solving  $M = 2.86$  ( $SD = 0.92$ ), Compliance  $M = 2.59$  ( $SD = 0.80$ ), Withdrawal  $M = 2.23$  ( $SD = 0.83$ ), and Conflictive engagement  $M = 1.55$  ( $SD = 0.65$ ). The significant differences among the four resolution styles were established after tests of within-subjects effects were run,  $F(3, 323) = 255.49, p < 0.01$ . The significant differences were found with regard to withdrawal from parents and positive problem solving styles with parents. Overall mean scores for the use of all four resolution styles lay within the range for "Sometimes" (between 2 and 4), indicating moderate or less use of conflict resolution styles, though the use of positive problem solving style was the most used strategy.

A paired-sample  $t$ -test was done to determine differences in adolescents' conflict resolution styles with mothers and fathers. Only the positive problem solving scores with mothers and fathers indicated a within-subjects significant difference with  $t(df) = 3.64, p < 0.01$ . The mean score for



**Fig. 28.1** Age differences in mean conflict with mother and with father



**Fig. 28.2** Gender differences in mean conflict with father

positive problem solving with mother  $M=2.98$  ( $SD=0.89$ ), was higher than the mean score for positive problem solving with father  $M=2.86$  ( $SD=0.92$ ).

### Conflict Resolution with Mother

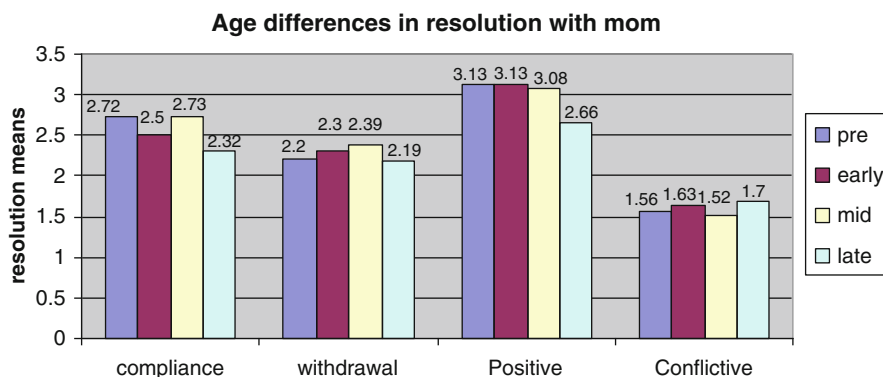
Only two out of the four conflictive resolution styles turned out to be significantly different among the different age groups of adolescents. These were Compliance  $F(3, 323)=5.78, p<0.05$  and Positive problem solving  $F(3, 323)=6.49, p<0.01$ . Overall, the adolescents used positive problem solving style most for conflict resolution with mother, followed by compliance, withdrawal, and conflictive engagement, in descending order. The age differences in compliance lay significantly between the late adolescents as compared to both the preadolescents and the middle adolescents. The late adolescents indicated the least use of compliance with mothers

among the three groups. For problem solving with mother, the significant age differences lay between the late adolescents and the three younger age groups. The oldest group used the least positive problem solving style with mother among the four age groups. The outcome for gender differences was not significant with respect to all the four resolution styles. There was no interaction effect between age and gender in these conflict resolution styles.

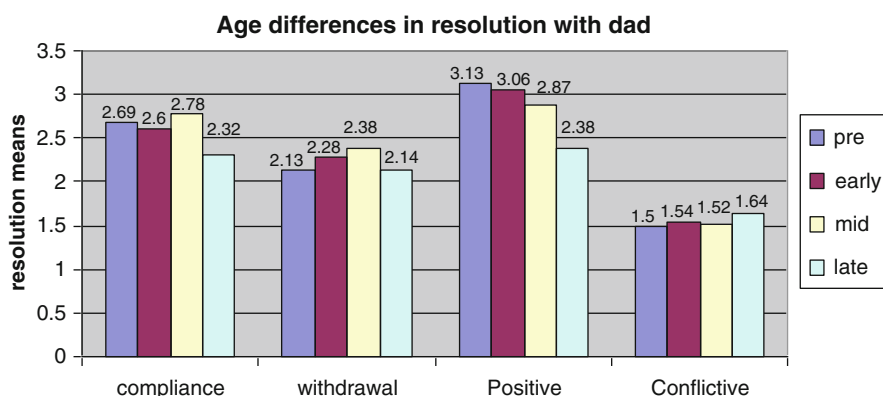
### Conflict Resolution with Father

Likewise, univariate analyses of conflict resolution styles with father also indicated that Compliance  $F(3, 323)=5.04, p<0.05$  and Positive problem solving  $F(3, 323)=11.25, p<0.01$  significantly differed among the four age groups. Overall, the adolescents used positive problem solving style most for conflict resolution with father, followed by compliance, conflictive





**Fig. 28.3** Age differences in mean conflict resolution with mother



**Fig. 28.4** Age differences in mean conflict with father

engagement, and withdrawal, in descending order. Total overall means for each conflict resolution with father in descending order were: Positive problem solving  $M=2.86$  ( $SD=0.92$ ), Compliance  $M=2.59$  ( $SD=0.80$ ), Withdrawal  $M=2.23$  ( $SD=0.83$ ), and Conflictive engagement  $M=1.55$  ( $SD=0.65$ ).

Interestingly, the significant differences in compliance and problem solving with the father lay between the same age groups as with the mother. Thus, for compliance, the differences were between the late adolescents and both the preadolescents and the middle adolescents, wherein the late adolescents indicated the least compliance to father. For problem solving with father, the significant differences were between the late adolescents and the other three younger age groups, wherein the oldest group indicated

the least use of positive problem solving with the father. Figures 28.3 and 28.4 present the significant differences in mean conflict resolution styles with mother and father, according to age. There was also no significant gender difference in conflict resolution styles with each parent; neither was there an interaction between age and gender with regard to conflict resolution styles.

### Family Cohesion

The adolescents' perceptions of family cohesion were determined by their responses to the 20 statements on family closeness, according to a 5-point scale where 1 meant "Almost never," and 5 meant "Almost always." The overall mean family cohesion score was moderate  $M=3.13$  ( $SD=0.57$ ). The outcome indicated that these Chinese-Filipino adolescents perceived their

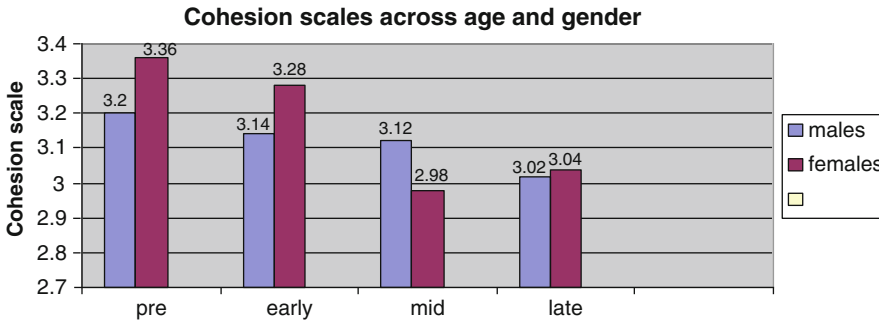


Fig. 28.5 Age differences in family cohesion

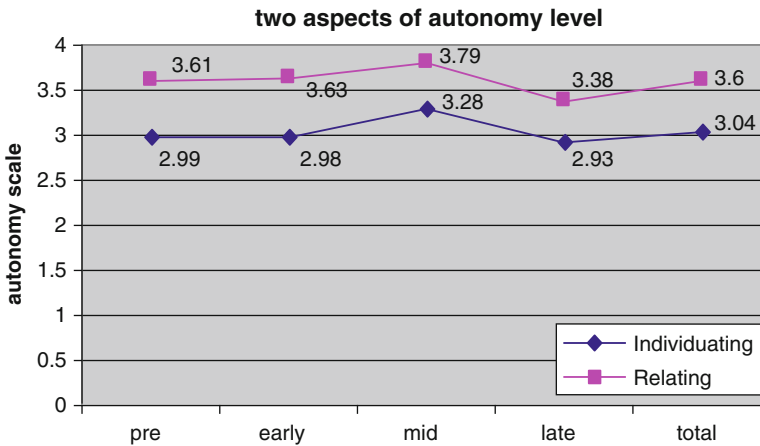


Fig. 28.6 Differences levels between individualizing and relating autonomy

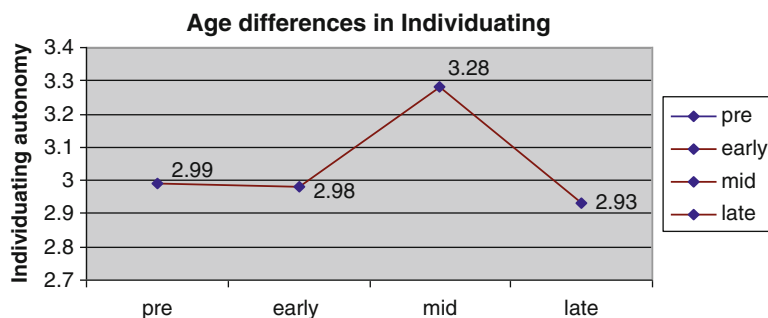
overall family relationship as neither too close nor too distant. Univariate analysis of variance showed significant differences in cohesion according to age,  $F(3, 323)=4.69$ ,  $p<0.05$ . Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons showed that the mean differences between preadolescents and the middle and late adolescents were significant ( $p<0.05$ ), indicating that the youngest group reported the highest family cohesion level. Mean family cohesion scores, however, did not differ significantly between male and female respondents. There were no interactions between age and gender. Figure 28.5 shows the significant differences in perceived family cohesion across age. The hypothesis that younger adolescents perceived lower family cohesion was not proven in this study.

### Adolescent Autonomy

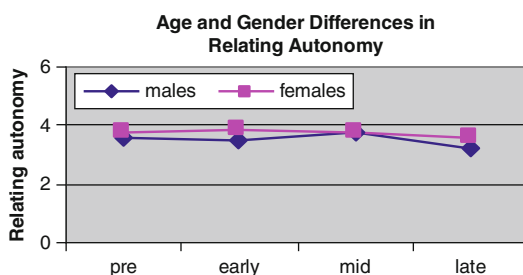
Adolescents' responses to the 30 statements on self-determination in thinking, feeling, and

behaving were used to tap into their two levels of autonomy: the intra-individual level, known as individualizing autonomy and the interpersonal level, known as relating autonomy. Scores ranges from 0 to 5; higher means indicate higher autonomy levels.

Using a paired-sample  $t$ -test for within-subjects analysis, it was found that these adolescents' level of individualizing autonomy and relating autonomy differed significantly,  $t(323)=-15.95$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; with individualizing autonomy  $M=3.03$ ,  $SD=0.59$  and relating autonomy  $M=3.62$ ,  $SD=0.62$ . The level of adolescents' relating autonomy in this study is thus higher than their individualizing autonomy, as hypothesized in this study. Still, the overall mean scores for both individualizing and relating autonomy indicated a moderate level of autonomy. Figure 28.6 shows the significant differences in the levels between these adolescents' individualizing and relating autonomy.



**Fig. 28.7** Age differences in individuating autonomy



**Fig. 28.8** Age and gender differences in relating autonomy

### Individuating Autonomy

Results from univariate analysis indicated that there was a significant age difference between middle adolescents and the other three age groups  $F(3, 323)=8.52, p<0.01$ , as shown in Fig. 28.7. The middle adolescents indicated the highest level of individuating autonomy among the four age groups. Thus, the hypothesis that older adolescents will indicate higher individuating autonomy was proven, although they were not the oldest in this study. There were no significant gender differences and no interaction effects.

### Relating Autonomy

Results from univariate analysis indicated that there were significant age difference  $F(3, 323)=6.09, p<0.01$  and gender difference  $F(1, 323)=12.05, p<0.05$  for relating autonomy as shown in Fig. 28.8. For age, the significant difference was between the late adolescents and the three younger groups, wherein the late adolescents indicated least relating autonomy across the four groups. For gender difference, the female respondents showed higher relating autonomy levels than the male respondents as hypothesized. The interaction effect was not significant.

## Discussion

### Frequency of Parent-Adolescent Conflict

Consistent with Blos' psychoanalytical approach (1962, 1967), which was further explained with Steinberg's normative re-alignment theory, the hypothesis that frequency of conflict with parents peaked at the early stage of adolescence was confirmed. In Blos' (1962) view, the onset of adolescence signifies attitudes and behavior patterns of secondary individuation, wherein the developing child is catching up with all the maturational conditions that give rise to ego differentiation and integration. The fast-growing child re-experiences emotional disengagement from internalized infantile objects, i.e., replacing an idealized parental image with a more realistic one. The increase in parent-adolescent conflict facilitates the process, which is conceptualized as autonomy *from* parents. Steinberg (1990) further developed the notion of such temporary "perturbations" in the family system, wherein both parent and adolescent child actively participate in the mutual and reciprocal process of redefining relationship. According to Steinberg, such transformations in family relations during adolescence reflect the adolescent's growing understanding of his or her *interdependence* within the family and the parent's willingness to engage in a process through which close ties are maintained but the young person's individuality is not threatened. Thus, parent-adolescent conflict is viewed as part of familial adjustment to accommodate the fast-maturing adolescent. In this study, conflict was

operationalized as “disagreement” or discussion with parents that may be about major issues or decisions, or may be about everyday responsibilities, like doing house chores (Smetana 1989).

Chinese-Filipino adolescents aged 11–12 (the preadolescents) indicated highest levels of conflict with their mothers and with their fathers; those aged 16–18 (middle adolescents) indicated lowest levels of conflict with their mothers and fathers. Overall, the youngest participants exhibited higher conflict with their parents among the four age groups. As the literature pointed out, the frequency of disagreements increases between childhood and early adolescence, remaining stable through middle adolescence, and declines somewhat thereafter (Steinberg 1990). Although the overall frequency of conflict for these participants was relatively small (an average of once a month or less), this study indicated that parent–adolescent conflict ushers in a natural developmental process when disturbances in balance, realignment of familial ties, and search of self-identity or an autonomous self are the patterns of interplay in the adolescent years.

Smetana’s (1989) social-cognitive model, emphasizing the different domains of conflict issues, can be seen in the kinds of topics of discussion/disagreement with parents (Smetana and Asquith 1994; Smetana 1995). Among the conflict domains where the boundaries between parental authority and adolescent personal jurisdiction are negotiated, are: personal issues (actions having consequences only to the actor); multifaceted issues (issues entailing both personal and conventional components, like friendship issues); and prudential issues (acts having immediate, negative, and directly perceptible consequences to the self and include issues of safety, harm to the self, comfort and health). Smetana and Asquith (1994) found that parents treated multifaceted, friendship, prudential, and personal issues as more contingent on parental authority than did adolescents, who treated these as under personal jurisdiction. Yet even as parents and adolescents agreed that parents should retain authority regarding moral issues (acts that are prescriptively wrong because they affect the rights and welfare of others); and conventional

issues (arbitrary and consensually agreed upon behavioral uniformities that structures social interactions within social systems), conflicts in these domains were more intense than in all other domains.

Consistent with Smetana (1989) on conflict domains, the present survey data showed the top three issues with mothers as: laziness attitude, setting bedtime, and how well I do in school; those with fathers as: being respectful to people, setting bedtime, and helping around the house. The present study did not focus on an analysis of conflict domains, but a cursory look reveals that these issues can be classified as multifaceted, prudential and personal issues where both personal and conventional components overlapped.

No hypothesis about gender differences in frequency of conflict with parents was asserted in this study. Interestingly, this “no gender difference” was attested with almost overwhelming responses from the female focus groups, wherein answers to inquiries of differential treatment of parents of boys and girls at home, were: “not really,” “just right,” “maybe more expectations for boys,” and “no favoritism for boys is shown.” The implication is that the Chinese families in the Philippines may have integrated the egalitarian view of socialization, treating each child without partiality as to gender. This is not to negate the possibility that some Chinese-Filipino families may still adhere to male prominence at home, although starting to see the importance of the females’ support and contribution in many practical ways.

The survey outcome revealed, however, a significant gender difference regarding these adolescents’ conflict frequency with father, wherein the male participants depicted higher levels of conflict with father than the female adolescents. There were no gender differences in conflict with mother, however. According to Chao and Tseng (2002), alleged parenting differences between Asian fathers and mothers have been based on the traditional maxim, *strict father, kind mother*, wherein fathers exercise high degrees of authoritarian control and mothers exhibit high degrees of warmth. In a few empirical studies, Chinese children reported their fathers being more controlling and less warm toward sons than toward

daughters, and their mothers more controlling but no less warm toward daughters than sons (Berndt et al. 1993; Fuligni 1998; Chao and Tseng 2002). Results from Lung (1999) studies pointed to a higher conflict level with parents for Chinese American males than for Caucasian females, in light of cultural factors. The family line and property usually go from the father to the son, with more expectations placed on the adolescent son to succeed academically, to support parents in their old age, and to carry on the family name. Therefore, the Chinese-Filipino male adolescents reporting higher conflict with their fathers may probably indicate their being subjected to a higher level of familial pressure than the females.

### Variations in Parent-Adolescent Conflict Resolutions

Among the four conflict resolution styles used by the survey participants with their parents, positive problem solving was the most likely style used, followed by compliance, then withdrawal and the least used was conflictive engagement. This outcome indicated that the Chinese-Filipino adolescents in this study undertook positive problem solving style most of the time, meaning, they would most probably sit down, discuss differences, or negotiate with the parent and find acceptable alternatives whenever conflict occurs. Next to positive problem solving style, compliance was used, that is, these Chinese-Filipino adolescents were somewhat likely to be submissive or gave in with little attempt to present their side in order to resolve their parent-adolescent conflict. The other two styles, namely, withdrawal (remaining silent for a long time, shutting down, refusing to talk, or tuning out the other partner by acting distant) and conflictive engagement (launching a personal attack, exploding out of control, saying things that were not meant, or throwing insults at the other party) were rarely used as resolution tactics. In many ways, these findings underlie the Asian culture, as noted in the distinct familial relationship of harmony, communality, and respect for elders (Peña 2001; Wonohadidjojo 2004).

Still, they contradicted Lung's (1999) findings that Chinese American families used more culturally relevant tactics such as avoidance, guilt, and shaming, including more severe physical aggression. This could be attributed to the different degree of traditional patterns even in other Chinese societies and families (Berndt et al. 1993). Another possible explanation could be the Chinese-Filipino adolescents' adherence to interdependent values, wherein greater importance is placed on harmonious relations with others. The Filipino social values of *hiya* (a sense of honor and propriety), *pakikisama* (good interpersonal relation and company), and *utang na loob* (a sense of deep solidarity and gratitude) may have been integrated by the Chinese-Filipino adolescents, thus, the use of more non-aggressive tactics like positive problem solving and compliance strategies. On the other hand, the Chinese American families in Lung's (1999) studies may still adhere to the traditional family structure that is more hierarchical and parents are not typically expected to accommodate to their children. A higher use of aggressive tactics in Chinese American families may convey the Chinese saying about the punishment of children, that is, "no hitting/spanking, no achievement."

With regard to age, the late adolescent group from the survey indicated the least positive problem solving with both parents, and they also reported the lower use of compliance when compared to the preadolescents and the middle adolescents. In fact, the late adolescents only scored highest with the use of conflictive engagement with mother and father. Conversely, younger groups exhibited the highest positive problem solving style with parents. This seems to confirm the older adolescents' growing needs for self-regulation and competence, and greater empowerment to assert their stand. The outcome is concomitant with studies on adolescents' beliefs and expectations about authority and autonomy, wherein similar developmental trends were evident even among adolescents of various ethnic groups. As the adolescents became older, they indicated a greater willingness to openly disagree with their parents and a lower endorsement of parental authority over their personal lives (Smetana 1989;



Fuligni 1998). This is consistent also with Peña's (2001) findings with Filipino adolescents, whose conformity, perceptions of legitimacy of parental authority, and the importance of conformity all decreased as the adolescents got older. Such movement towards individuation implies that autonomy-seeking is a normative process across adolescence, even in an interdependent culture such as the Chinese-Filipino setting.

Gender differences in conflict resolutions were not presupposed in this study. In the survey, there were no gender differences and no interactions between age and gender for all the four conflict resolution styles. These reflect that both male and female adolescents in this study were likely to use the same conflict resolution strategies with their parents.

## Levels of Family Cohesion

The results from the survey data showed that adolescents rated their family interactions at home as high in cohesion. The youngest age groups indicated the highest cohesiveness with parents, relative to the mid-adolescent and the late adolescent groups. The hypothesis that family cohesion will be lower for the younger Chinese-Filipino adolescents was not supported. This hypothesis was influenced by the findings from Newman (1989), that older children were more appreciative of their fathers' nurturing qualities, thus promoting family cohesiveness, than were the younger children. Another impetus for this hypothesis was from other studies asserting that less parental warmth and more control would be related to more intense conflict, hence, the inference that there would be lower family cohesion for the younger adolescents who engage in higher conflict (Yau and Smetana 1996). However, although younger adolescents do indicate higher conflict frequency with parents, this may not necessarily translate to their having lower perception of family cohesion. Moreover, the older adolescents' perception of lower cohesiveness may point to their developmental task of separating themselves from parents, and desiring greater autonomy and independence (Noller and Callan

1986; Newman 1989). Other studies have reported that older adolescents of all ethnic backgrounds indicated less cohesion with their parents than did younger ones (Fuligni 1998; Peña 2001). The outcome from the focus groups also revealed that the youngest age groups gave the most indications that their families were very close. The adolescents' perception of family cohesiveness was also fairly high as with the survey outcome.

As with the conflict dimensions, gender differences in family cohesion were not proposed in this study. The survey data reported no significant gender difference among these Chinese-Filipino adolescents in perception of family cohesiveness. This outcome was consistent with the findings by Barnes and Olson (1985), wherein no sex differences between how male and female adolescents perceived their communication with their parents, and how parents of either sex perceived their communication with them, were found.

## Age Differences in Autonomy

Age-related differences in the levels of both individuating and relating autonomy were found as hypothesized. The dual orientations of adolescent autonomy fit well for the Chinese-Filipino participants, coming from a collectivistic society wherein a sense of responsibility toward others is placed higher or even more important than a sense of independence.

The relational aspect of autonomy reflects the Eastern value of family-sovereignty that emphasizes harmonious interdependence, which is more salient for the Chinese-Filipino adolescents (Yeh et al. 2003; Yeh 2004). This is illustrated in the support for the hypothesis that Chinese-Filipino adolescents manifest higher relating autonomy over individuating autonomy. With regard to individuating autonomy, significant age differences were found, with the middle adolescents exhibiting the highest level as compared to the other three groups. With regard to relating autonomy, both age and gender differences were found. The late adolescents indicated significantly lowest relating autonomy in comparison to three other age groups. As

hypothesized in this study, the girls exhibited higher relating autonomy than boys. It could be said that traditional sex roles define males as more instrumental and females as more expressive or relational. Nevertheless, a number of studies indicate that becoming autonomous may be more stressful for girls than for boys and that girls show higher levels of emotional autonomy than boys (Steinberg and Silverberg 1986; Lamborn and Steinberg 1993). This is also understandable, given cultural expectations on daughters to be more nurturing and caring.

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## **Part IV**

# **Negotiation, Family Instability and Emerging Family Forms**

# Setting Out Conditions, Striking Bargains: Marriage-Stories and Career Development Among University-Educated Women in Hong Kong

May Partridge

## Story-Making and Story-Telling

Processes of story-making and story-telling may be among the oldest of human endeavors, but only recently have social researchers come to recognize them as means by which individuals create themselves in relation to their societies.<sup>1</sup> In fact, story-making and story-telling are used by individuals both to differentiate themselves as individuals and to integrate themselves with their various communities. But because this differentiation and integration proceed through a language shared with others, any and all accounts by individuals are fundamentally social, and from the outset, these accounts indicate various kinds of relationships with the larger discourses of social practice common to a society.

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Adler (1870–1937) seems to have been the first modern social thinker to observe that in order to function in society, individuals created what he called “personal fictions,” stories about the self and others from social materials available that permitted and justified action. Despite George Herbert Mead’s (1863–1931) complementary interest in the “looking glass self,” this insight was largely let drop by sociologists until the 1960s. Then social theorists took what Richard Rorty has called “the linguistic turn,” and feminists in particular have taken a strong interest in the constitutive role of language, and in how stories are created and used in the lives of women.

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Consequently, a number of social researchers, especially those influenced by feminist and post-modern thinking, are now doing what is termed “narrative research.”<sup>2</sup> Such research seeks to interpret the stories of women and others, not only within their individual contexts, but also more broadly, as being within and part of other social processes.

One such process is marriage. Marriage has long been recognized as the “social glue” for most societies, enabling as it does, not only established practices for sexual expression and rearing of young, but also, and possibly more fundamentally, legitimation of claims to property and other resources.<sup>3</sup> However, despite various attempts to develop universalized accounts of marriage within societies and across cultures, often through religious means, marriage shows itself to be a highly variable entity. And far from being divorced (if I may be forgiven this pun) from the material bases of economy, labor markets and working conditions within specific locales.

Marriage in Hong Kong provides no exception to these observations. As Janet Salaff shows in

<sup>2</sup> The literature in this area is now vast. Some publications relevant here are: (1) Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, eds. (1995), *Interpreting Experience: The Narrative Study of Lives*; (2) Sara Mills (2004), *Discourses*; and (3) Nancy Naples (2003), *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis and Activist Research*.

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* (1964) represents this thesis in its discussions of how families seek to build and maintain status.



her *Working Daughters of Hong Kong* (1981), young Chinese women in the colony of the early 1970s did not expect to have the marriages of their mothers, because they brought more earning power to the family. However, the extent to which accounts of marriage among women of Hong Kong have changed from that time (and are still changing) must be gauged by interpreting more recent stories.

As Tina Miller asserts in her 2005 book, *Making Sense of Motherhood*, women's stories cannot be taken as texts of fiction, but neither can they be taken at face value, as complete and accurate representations of reality. As she quotes Lieblisch and colleagues, "stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these 'remembered facts' (1998, p. 8, as cited)." The value of stories, Miller claims, comes with their ability to provide researchers with "vehicles for confronting contradictions among the individual's experience, constructions of self, and expectations based on cultural models (Mattingly and Garro 1984, p. 771, as cited)."

Women's stories about marriage in Hong Kong in the late twentieth century can tell us a great deal about how women then were developing their senses of "self in relationship," and attempting to manage the contradictions they found between cultural ideals and economic facts. However, the value of such stories to social research is not merely that they offer opportunity to identify and interpret discontinuities within individual accounts, but also that they provide potential for comparing stories through time, within and across groups of women and other collectivities. Through such comparisons, we can assess the relative strength of certain social conditions in people's lives, and at specific points, the effects these conditions may be having. We can see where people have been, and are being made, vulnerable: where they have been, and are being, pressed to take new actions and to change the kinds of accounts they make for those actions. It is to such a picture of change that I wish to attend.

## Marriage-Stories in Hong Kong, 1991–1992 and 1999–2000

In my first study of university-educated women's career development in British Columbia and Hong Kong, I found that marriage, and particularly the type of marital interaction created by spouses' on-going discussions of responsibilities for housework and childcare, did indeed become a major constituent of women's career strategies.<sup>4</sup> But I also found that the kinds of spouse and the kinds of marital interaction preferred had much to do with earlier accounts of marriage from women's families of origin. Since it was generally mothers of participants who told and retold these stories, I termed them "mother-stories" and examined them in relation to stories their daughters then told about their own marriages. Consequently, my analysis here of individual "marriage-stories" begins in each case with the discussion of the particular kind of mother-story common among women following a particular path in career development.<sup>5</sup>

I also saw that women's career strategies tended to persist over time, but the evidence also suggested that specific social conditions might enable change. For example, in 1992, Hong Kong women in social work who had formed original career strategies of accommodation to family were moving into negotiating their roles in jobs and marriages—because the tide of emigration from Hong Kong had then opened up many more opportunities for good jobs in social services.

<sup>4</sup>Other constituents of women's career strategies consisted in their relationships with mothers in families of origin, as well as with teachers and peers in educational institutions, and conditions of work in occupations and employment. In association with specific types of career strategy and career development, each constituent tended to make for particular kinds of story-making. See Partridge (1996).

<sup>5</sup>As such, mother-stories add another dimension here to the kind of historical sociology enabled by narrative research. But these stories are not just about marriage; they are also about education, employment, child care, social life and work generally. They are foundational, multi-dimensional stories with which daughters must come to terms as they forge their own life accounts.

In fact, this finding suggested that conditions of employment, in combination with the type of marital bargain possible with spouse, determined not only persistence or change in career strategies, but also the relative degree of success university-educated women might achieve.

When I revisited a number of my participants in late 1999 and early 2000, I saw then how dramatic an impact on women's career strategies the global economy and the digitized workplace was having. But still, the kind of marriages in which women participated enabled certain kinds of responses to that impact and disabled others. Their still-unfolding stories about marriage made this clear.<sup>6</sup>

Drawing on larger discourses (those of "traditional Chinese marriage" and of Western, "romantic love"), these women told what I have called "marriage-stories" to explain their experience and actions. In the process of this kind of story-making and story-telling, they constructed themselves as actors visible to themselves in a larger relationship. As well as rationalizing past behavior, they were trying to make sense of that relationship in a larger perspective and how best to go on with it in future. They tried to feel comfortable with what they saw happening, especially when events challenged their previous constructs of what marriage was supposed to be in general and what they believed their own marriage to be in particular. Hence, their stories about marriage were always "works-in-progress," just as were their other accounts of families of origin, education and employment. Therefore, I found myself defining a marriage-story as description of the nature of the participant's marriage, how it evolved and what it appeared to mean at a specific time, against what the participant thought marriage was or should be in general.

Perhaps because these young women often still had relationships with grandparents for whom marriage was indeed an event where families acquired new resources, or perhaps because their parents had only in their lifetimes seen marriage become largely a matter of personal decision-making—or even because of the pervasive business culture of Hong Kong—many of my participants talked about marriage in terms of a bargain. I was struck by the need many saw to establish their "bottom-line" and to fix certain conditions as the "price" of marriage before entering the relationship.<sup>7</sup> Particularly if they were inclined to accommodation or negotiation, these university-educated women approached marriage pragmatically—neither romantically, nor instrumentally, but in a matter-of-fact manner that recognized their personal value in the marriage market—and proceeded accordingly.

Moreover, I saw that particular kinds of marriage-stories did exist in association with certain types of career strategy. In the case of women who had built their careers around strategies of accommodation to family, there were various versions of a marriage-story I could entitle "Seeking Harmony." Among negotiators, those who made decisions about education and occupation with a view to being able to arrange family to fit, the resulting account might be called "Maintaining the Bargain." And finally, among the women who avoided marriage, or more often, motherhood, there were stories I classified as "Creating Alternatives."

I offer examples of these three types of marriage-story below. Each analysis begins with a mother-story from the family of origin, moves on to the participant's initial views of marriage in

<sup>6</sup>My approach to narrative research has developed through experience with comparing topics, such as relationships with mothers, and their relative weights of significance across various groups of accounts, and finding that certain meanings, associated with particular topics, emerge strongly in some groups and not in others. The inherently chronological nature of accounts concerned with career development has, in turn, pushed forward the possibility of comparing such themes longitudinally.

<sup>7</sup>A typical comment illustrating these young women's awareness of their potential value to a husband looking for a mate with good prospects, among the many from the student participants in 1991: "And also I think a man would require his wife to have been superior in some respects, who can also provide herself security. I think when a man comes to be married with a woman he requires that this woman can also contribute something to the family."

1991–1992, and then finishes with her views in 1999–2000.<sup>8</sup> In each case, I focus primarily on events and circumstances that appear to inform and modify each of these three women's accounts of marriage—what it means and how one is to “carry on” with it.

As will be seen, each of these stories has a common thread. All three are concerned with communication. While each of the participants expresses different beliefs about what communication consists of and how it should go on in marriage, the ability to communicate in a certain way is seen as essential to maintaining intimacy. And intimacy has become the major expectation of marriage. Whatever compromises intimacy for these women, therefore, compromises marriage.

### **Ting Yee: Seeking Harmony**

A student in 1991, Ting Yee impressed me as a young woman who had her mind quietly, but thoroughly, made up about her future. Appearing less anxious than some of the other would-be accommodators, she was clear that although she enjoyed the arts and communication aspects of her comparative literature major, she had no suppressed hankerings to work in film or other glamorous fields in the arts. Like a number of other students who indicated they were building careers primarily to fit family, she was looking to business as the place to make money; first for her mother, and then, eventually, for her family of marriage. She had taken optional courses in economics and found such courses easy; hence, her confidence.

Ting Yee has the mother-story<sup>9</sup> common to many Hong Kong accommodators; that is, she tells the story of her family of origin in terms of a mother's sacrifice. Married to a husband who had difficulty maintaining employment, this mother has worked in a meat-packing plant and now has arthritis in her hands. Ting Yee's mother still tells the story that she could have married a doctor and had a much easier life, so it is clear to Ting Yee that her mother expects her to marry a professional. In fact, Ting Yee knows that her mother has high expectations overall of her one daughter who has made it to university—that she will go on to complete her education, make money, and marry well. As Ting Yee puts it, someone who is “[ambitious,] hardworking and somebody who will take care of the family. Maybe just the opposite of my father.”

Ting Yee has little difficulty with this expectation, but she still feels somewhat ambivalent about her father. During our first interview she expresses her disappointment with her father's lack of communication (he talks with her brother, but not with her), but she still feels somehow that he loves her; for example, he will buy her things when her mother will not.

She resents her father and brothers' refusal to share in the housework. Earlier, she says, she took it for granted that females did all the cooking and cleaning, but now she lives in the residence hall and sees “...the boys, they do their own housework and keep clean...I think everybody should have the duty to do the housework.”

Yet Ting Yee finds the constant reiteration of the role of the family in the feminist literature and on the part of some professors “too extreme.” Just as

<sup>8</sup>In 1991–1992, the original research group was composed of University of Hong Kong students about to graduate, as well as of graduates then a decade out into the labor force. Thus I was able to re-interview in 1999 and 2000 those who had been students at the time of the earlier study and who might still be considering marriage, in addition to graduates approaching middle age who were then taking stock of partnerships formed earlier.

<sup>9</sup>I coined the term “mother-story” first to describe the similar stories I was hearing from university-educated women in British Columbia and Hong Kong about their mothers' accounts of marital experience. For example, women tending to career strategies of accommodation most often told a mother-story of a female parent who was the emotional center of her family and who had faced great difficulty in keeping her family together and caring for her children. Such a parent often presented her daughter with a certain kind of marriage as an ideal within which one could then do a proper job of raising children.

she recalls her discomfort with her mother's continuing talk about how difficult it has been for her and speaks of her awareness that in the face of it her father falls silent about his own problems with work, she speaks of her distaste with a discourse that appears constantly to blame men: "They always try to fight or criticize the man's doing; always [to] criticize is not good." Just as Ting Yee believes the advertising image of the business woman in Hong Kong should not show her as a "lone wolf," isolated from family and friends, she believes that women should not be constantly critical, but instead relax, "think harmony."

Ting Yee's concept of harmony informs her early thinking about marriage. But it is by no means a simple-minded notion of the kind where she, the woman, will suppress her thoughts and feelings in favor of those of her spouse. While it draws on the language of Confucious, her construct of harmony is one also informed by the romantic discourses of East and West, as these have appeared in Hong Kong popular culture. For harmony means to Ting Yee mutual caring for each other's feelings. And she is quite clear that unless someone can meet that condition with her, she will not continue the relationship.

In this, she is like many of her Hong Kong sisters. Since marriage is seen as a lifetime relationship, she must take responsibility to see that her conditions are met: "If you don't find the right one, the whole life will be ruined." Which is the course of action she says that she followed in late high school, when she broke up with her first boyfriend. He was not kind to her feelings, despite her efforts to set up a system of reciprocal caring. Such a duty to assure reciprocal caring, she tells me, contrasts sharply with the views expressed by Christians she has known, who believe that God has destined their partners, and they must simply acquiesce in whatever temperamental idiosyncrasies emerge as the relationship develops.

Now Ting Yee has another boyfriend; as it turns out, a medical student whom her mother idolizes, but also a man who promises to be considerate in the manner Ting Yee seeks. She thinks they may marry. As she waits for his completion of medical school, she will fit her life around his

schedule. She anticipates she will use the time first to work for some money for her mother and then perhaps go abroad to take more education. But in the end, her goal is clear: "I am always hoping for a stable and happy family."

If sacrifice is required for the marriage her parents did not have, then it will come in the form of her employment. In her student marriage-story, the desire for a particular type of communication is paramount; if she and her husband can communicate effectively in this manner, she believes that consensus will follow: "I think the most important is to speak about your feelings—what do you want—because there is no other, no better than you if you want that thing."

Ting Yee seeks harmony, but she has a condition for it. When we next meet in late 1999, she is still trying to make a decision about marriage. Again, she is involved in a relationship where she is insisting on the kind of two-way communication where her feelings are respected, but things are not going well.

It is worth examining why. For while Ting Yee is willing to move with her husband and take a new job (despite a lengthy struggle to land her present management position in a major bank), the length of their workdays precludes the kind of intimacy she seeks. She has to make a special effort to listen and be supportive, and she wants her future partner to do the same. He is having difficulty:

...we both work hard during the day, and you don't want to talk much during the evening. You're so tired. But, you know, if you don't talk, or you don't express your feelings to others, you cannot improve your relationship...So [I'm] trying to get him to talk more. And to listen more. But it is a hard way to go.

They are in the process of trying to work out this problem, but if her prospective spouse cannot find a way to be more communicative in the way Ting Yee expects, then they will not marry. She has her conditions, and this aspect of them she will not relinquish. Her mother is now divorced, and Ting Yee remembers all too well the failure of harmony in her parents' household.

The issue is not her willingness to accommodate to family. As she says:

I have such a traditional thinking that the man is the center of the family. You know, if my partner or my boyfriend or my future husband ...can earn enough money, maybe I would get into a more simple job, not getting high salary, but having more time to put into the family.

As her mother urges, she will devote time exclusively for her children.<sup>10</sup>

Rather, the sticking point for marriage appears to be a guarantee for communication of a certain kind. If Ting Yee does not see that her feelings will be taken into account in the making of decisions that affect both their lives, she will not continue in the relationship. Like other would-be accommodators I met earlier in Hong Kong, she would rather become an avoider by default, than be perpetually unhappy.

But another factor now complicates this kind of marriage-story. It interferes at the most basic level with communication, whether this be about the making of bargains or an equal exchange of thoughts and feelings. And that is time. Or more precisely, the lack of time. Ting Yee's prospective husband may not be interested in heart-to-heart talks, or he may simply be exhausted, as Ting Yee often is herself.

For those with careers in business, and those without, the Hong Kong ethos of unrelenting effort demands non-stop activity.<sup>11</sup> Over the decade, Hong Kong business's special proclivity for long hours has grown in parallel with its use of electronic technology. The resulting intensification

of work presents everyone with experiences and events for which they must find explanations. But as yet, Ting Yee does not blame the work culture of Hong Kong for her would-be partner's lack of interest in communication, nor does she consider that her willingness to cut her work hours down in favor of her spouse's job might do little to help the situation.

Ting Yee is on the horns of a dilemma, and it is by no means clear what she will do.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the previous generations of Hong Kong women who had few options for dealing with the potential pain of a spouse disinterested in their difficulties, Ting Yee can decide, as a minority of other accommodators in this research have done, simply not to marry, but to find in friendships, churches and other community activities the mutual caring they seek. If she does marry and finds the relationship more difficult than she can manage, she may even seek divorce. It would be a last resort, but the marriage-story that now accompanies a career strategy of accommodation is changing—no longer need one accept a spouse who is careless of a wife's feelings—a message implicit in earlier mother-stories about continuing resentment and unending, apparently unappreciated, labor is one that tells daughters to do better, by marrying better. If harmony cannot be found in marriage, perhaps one will then do best to avoid it.

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### **Tin Oi: Maintaining the Bargain**

Tall and elegant, even behind her desk, Tin Oi rises to greet me with a handshake. At our first meeting, she is on her way up through management in the Hong Kong educational system and anxious to receive me well. Married for seven years, with two

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<sup>10</sup> But if she must continue in her present job to help support the family, she would like her mother or mother-in-law to care for the children, rather than a maid. This preference for childcare within the extended family remains an ideal among many of the unmarried participants in this research. Such a preference may contribute to the general lack of pressure for an accessible, publicly funded early childhood system which integrates both education and daily care.

<sup>11</sup> One of the most powerful stories about Hong Kong reiterates over and over the morality of hard work, how its people deserve their success because of their willingness to work in conditions of incredible difficulty. This story is never questioned officially, even now, when survival is no longer an issue, because it has proven so useful a means of social control. As a consequence, many individuals call the cumulative exhaustion built up through years of long hours and tight deadlines mere laziness on their parts, rather than a signal of acute distress.

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<sup>12</sup> Ting Yee's marriage-story is under severe siege. If she clings to her condition for marriage, she may never marry; on the other hand, if she relinquishes it, she seems almost certain to be resentful. Perhaps she will revert to a version of the story I first heard from the older, unmarried graduate accommodators in 1992. In those cases, if they were Christian, they explained their condition for marriage as needing a Christian man and were accepting of spinsterhood in their communities. But, if like Ting Yee, they were non-believers, they often expressed regret at having not seized their opportunities, imperfect as they seemed at the time.



daughters, she is just completing her M.Ed. through a special program at the University of Hong Kong and looking forward to her next promotion.

Tin Oi's mother-story is not the typical one of the self-sacrificing mother; rather it is one of the relatively few stories I hear in which a father is seen as family leader, but also as deserving of respect for his helpfulness to his wife and involvement in his children's daily lives. So while she has had to work as hard as her husband in supporting their children, Tin Oi's mother has conveyed no bitterness about her burdens to her daughter. Instead, this mother has been able to influence her husband on important points when necessary, and she has felt supported in doing her work for the family.

By contrast, in her own marriage, Tin Oi has not been able to maintain the kind of agreement she saw between her parents. She did not marry her first serious boyfriend, because she felt they were too different in their attitudes and could not make any kind of marital arrangement that would reconcile such differences. But more anxious to marry in her late 20s, she met another teacher and decided that she should accept his proposal, since he seemed honest and trustworthy—and he also wanted very much to get married. As she sees it now, her spouse was looking only for a home and children rather than a real marital partnership, because these were the sorts of things a Hong Kong man should have by a certain age, just as a Hong Kong woman.

Although Tin Oi's spouse started out by looking after the computers and other electronics in the household, eventually most housework was delegated to a maid. It is important to note that Tin Oi, and particularly her husband, can afford this kind of domestic help, for through it, Tin Oi has been able both to advance her career and to be available for her children.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A partner's financial ability to help hire domestic help appears to be a critical component of university-educated women's career development at present. By 2000, lower-earning women with lower-earning spouses in this research were finding themselves in the trap of needing to share fully in the payments for housing and general family support, but having no access to extra income to pay for household help. Thus they could neither take on the extra responsibilities or additional education to win the promotions they needed.

Children are very important to Tin Oi. They complete a family; more fundamentally, they are a set of experiences for husband and wife to share. Children need the psychological support of their parents, Tin Oi believes, and her husband's lack of interest in their children pains her. But she is most disappointed in his failure to communicate with her:

...he seldom talks to me on his personal matters, on his job or [any]thing; he doesn't talk to me. So when we come back home, he always watches TV and I play with the kids and he doesn't allow the kids to disturb him when he is watching TV. So, I found we have difficulty in communication; I don't know what he is thinking about, or when he is not happy, or things like that—I don't understand him now (laughs). So (pause), because seven years ago before I married him I think that he was a very considerate man, but not now, so I think this is the major change of seven years of marriage.

Her children are her ideal children, she says, but her husband is no longer her ideal spouse. Like other negotiators, Tin Oi expects to arrange the business of her marriage through discussion with her spouse, but she has failed to establish before marrying that this is a condition of the union. An expert negotiator on the job, Tin Oi feels she can use her skills to climb to the position she wants in employment, but she cannot find a way to engage a spouse who appears to have withdrawn from their household. When I leave this interview in early 1992, I wonder if this marriage can continue.

In late 1999, it is clear that the marriage has lasted, but that Tin Oi has withdrawn from any further attempt to engage her spouse. While her husband has had a rocky time over the recession following the 1997 recession, Tin Oi has continued to progress towards the greater role she sees for herself in the Hong Kong educational system. Now being groomed as a team leader in the latest series of reforms, she has immersed herself totally in the job. Her expanded role offers no conflict with her children's needs as she can take them with her on Saturdays to do their homework as she writes reports. Her husband can play tennis, she can work, and all is calm.

But she has stopped expecting any communication between them of feelings, or, indeed, even about events in their daily lives. Instead, she is grateful that the recession has pushed her spouse

closer to his children. He lost his job then and was forced to return to classroom teaching with younger children, an experience that has caused him to express more interest in his daughters. Now, even after returning to a career in business, he talks with them at mealtimes and checks in with them on their school projects. But he has little interest in Tin Oi's work; for example, being unwilling to help her with her computer problems, even though he has considerable skill in that area.

Nevertheless, Tin Oi seems content. She has a new boss who takes a strong, positive interest in his staff, and her work relationships now seem to compensate for the lack of interest in her marriage. It no longer matters to her that she and her husband have little communication; she has been able to drop this condition in favor of relationships with colleagues that allow expression, in work, of her deeper values. Children's learning is important, and to be able to lead those who enable their learning to do it better seems the best she can possibly hope for. She sees her own children doing well, now with the support of their father also, and so it is enough—for now. What comes later, Tin Oi will decide in due time.

But Tin Oi seems to miss something in her story, and perhaps that is any recognition of the impact of the electronic technology she is now struggling to master. When asked about what the latest round of changes to the educational system may mean to her in terms of lost resources, she dismisses the idea. Even though supervisory personnel like her are now being asked to do all their own secretarial work on computer, she does not see how this affects her time—that in fact, she is being asked to do more with less. For example, she will now have to type her reports in Chinese characters, which she says is a much more time-intensive process. The fact that she will now need to do this precludes any possible move by her husband to re-engage her in the marriage.<sup>14</sup> Now, even if she still wanted it, there is virtually no room left for the kind of communication she once sought to elicit.

<sup>14</sup> She now needs to spend all day in the office Saturday, but she will bring her children in the afternoon to do their homework. Sundays are devoted to the extended family of parents and grandparents.

Fortunately, Tin Oi's children do not require attention at this point that would demand more than the limited time she is able to give. If she were to find herself in 2000 as some other participants do, with an apparently indifferent spouse and children needing more time than can be spared from her employment, she would face a large contradiction.<sup>15</sup> It would be difficult then to maintain any marriage-story about mutual support, at least in child-rearing. Tin Oi has not been able to achieve the bargain she hoped for, one of on-going emotional support between spouses, and so her marriage-story has become: leave me to work, and I'll not ask for more. So long as her children manage well, this story can apparently be maintained.

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### Ka Yee: Creating Alternatives

I first met Ka Yee when she was struggling to develop an account of work that made sense for her. Not having been able to get a seat in the social sciences, she had taken an English major and was discovering that she would have to make a good deal of effort to translate this kind of education into something other than teaching. Coming from a family whose motto was stability, she felt very badly about being in such turmoil. But for Ka Yee, all the comforting sureties of youth were now being swept away by her experience of university and its pressure for entry to the adult world of employment. And she had many more questions than answers.

Ka Yee's mother-story of "work to ensure stability in the family" has been assured by a father who has always been able to earn the family's living on his own. Except for a brief period in the factories before the birth of her first child, her

<sup>15</sup> Married negotiators in 1991–1992 tended to want their partners to assume what they saw as a fair division of responsibility for "free" time spent with children and to be satisfied with their marriages when that division occurred. When it did not, they were more likely to be resentful of their spouses and seeking a way out of present employment into more flexible lines of work. By 2000, some who could afford to do so were leaving the work place and seeking a redefinition of work in their lives.

mother has worked at home caring for children and household. This mother has had her hands full with a mentally handicapped older son and then a rebellious younger one, who has resented the attention necessary for his older sibling, but she has remained steady in her caring.

More than many, Ka Yee is aware of her developing marriage story. She talks about the fantasies she indulged in with her teen-age friends in secondary school: "I also wanted to be a good housewife, to have a lovely child, and live happily with my husband. Some kind of dreams." Now she believes she is ready to be more realistic.

She is grateful to the boyfriend who has been a refuge from former friends who press her to continue in the church community she joined when younger. Her relationship with him has allowed her to explore her beliefs and to put many of them aside—although she still finds the Church's attitudes towards the concern with work and money useful in keeping herself from becoming too panicky about finding a job. Her boyfriend has also been coaching her about how to mount a methodical job search, and this is easing her anxiety as well.

Since she thinks she may marry this man in "three or four years," we explore her present ideas about marriage. She now wants more than simply stability in a mate, she says, she wants ambition. Nevertheless, she will continue in her own employment, and she is considering not having children. Like many of the student participants in this research seeking to justify remaining childless, she at first seems to turn the argument for moral motherhood<sup>16</sup> on its head: "...I cannot ensure whether my children will be happy or

not..." But a closer look at her comments reveals that she now realizes being a mother may not have the intrinsic value it is said to have: "...in most cases, most people are not very happy, even if they have a good environment, they have very good materials. In whatever circumstances, people are not always happy and satisfied. That's my main way of thinking, so I wonder maybe I will not bear children." So it really may not matter, regardless of how moral she is, whether Ka Yee becomes a mother or not. Being a mother or being mothered does not guarantee anybody happiness, she sees.

I ask her then if she thinks it is important to get married. She responds, "I think it's just a natural part of life. Everybody gets married." She then says she thinks having children is important in general and tells me why. Good mothers take care of their children's psychological needs. In Hong Kong, she feels, mothers do not pay enough attention to these needs, and that is what is important. She has learned this from her psychology courses.<sup>17</sup>

But when asked about what makes a good father, it becomes clear that Ka Yee's marriage-story is still very much a work in progress. She begins by telling me that the roles of mother and father are different, that she believes in the traditional Chinese division of labor, with the father looking after the child's intellectual and moral development, while the mother is responsible for physical care. When I probe, she then returns to her earlier position on the need to meet children's psychological needs—both parents are responsible for that, she says.

While she is afraid she is not strong enough to do the kind of social work she really wants to do (her earlier religious community has told her she seems too easily swayed, yet has frowned on girls becoming too assertive), she nevertheless looks forward to her future. In 10 years, she says: "I'm married, to be happy with my husband, quite a steady, stable life."

<sup>16</sup> The common thread of a societal discourse I have called "moral motherhood" ran through the accounts of many of my Hong Kong participants, particularly students and those tending towards a career strategy of accommodation. Briefly, moral motherhood can be summarized as the obligation of women to become mothers *only* if they can meet certain conditions. These conditions have much more to do now with the provision of emotional nurturance, education and morality than with earlier requirements for food, clothing and shelter. While the scope of this paper does not permit a full exploration of moral motherhood here, it is a powerful discourse for women in Hong Kong and is invoked to explain many fertility decisions. For example, see Partridge (2006).

<sup>17</sup> Such Western discourses may particularly affect Hong Kong students Western during their emerging accounts of marriage and family, and an exploration of attitudes before and after such courses could tell us much about their influence.

When I ask what a happy marriage looks like, Ka Yee says:

We can support each other, understand each other. We can—maybe I think it's important for us to have the same life direction, have the same life goals is quite important. So I think when I am ready to get married, I have to make sure whether my husband is having the same life goal as mine

Like Ting Yee, she wants a contract. So I am happy when Ka Yee agrees to see me again in 1999, because it will be interesting to see how her initial marriage-story has played out.

The confident young woman who arrives to meet me at Robert Black College could not be more different than the hesitant girl of 1992. In working with an agency that serves the mentally challenged, Ka Yee has found her niche. She has applied for graduate school in order to become a clinical psychologist.<sup>18</sup>

She asserts clearly now that she probably will not marry or have children,<sup>19</sup> but “living with somebody would be nice.” It is important that she have support for her work from any partner she may have, but she does not say until the end of our interview why there should be any question of this. Instead, she pays tribute to her earlier relationships with men as having helped her to define the sense of herself that expresses itself in her work. Once again she mentions the university boyfriend who helped her move away from a Christianity she found too judgmental, a Christianity that did not live the compassion it preached. This kind of compassion as she sees it, the tolerance for difference, is now central to her life and a goal she hopes to instill in those who work with mentally handicapped like her brother. She tells me that even the hurtful parting from her

second boyfriend has matured her by breaking her out of a series of aimless jobs in business and into work for the agency that now inspires her.

Ka Yee's earlier mother-story has led her to her own, unique work-story—one of achieving mastery in caring for those who are especially vulnerable. Her family, and her mother in particular, has made great sacrifices to care for a younger, mentally challenged brother. Her family has needed the services Ka Yee will now work to offer. But in the course of creating this new career path, Ka Yee is also beginning to develop another account of marriage.

Unlike Ting Yee and those who would accommodate to family if that would guarantee a husband who listens, Ka Yee now feels that she cannot set conditions for a partnership. She will not be looking for a bargain, as such, but she does not think she will be disappointed as Tin Oi has been by the discovery that she has a husband who does not communicate in the way Tin Oi had hoped to guarantee. For Ka Yee, there will be no relationship unless there is communication; communication *is* the relationship: “If he wasn't interested in what I'm doing or what I'm thinking, then I wouldn't go with him in the first place.”

In this she is setting off on a new story: “... feeling like I like being with myself better, instead of putting up with someone [I] don't really enjoy—their company.” In this new story, live-in relationships are simpler, because they avoid the complications of finances and housing, as well as expectations from families of origin. Yet unlike older avoiders, Ka Yee's version of avoidance of marriage is not about being single so she can focus on her work. It is more about enjoying life in a way that has not offered itself before.

Her advice to graduating students still reverberates with the one element she has brought forward from her Christian youth. Work is not primarily about money or status; it is about doing what you enjoy with other people. Ka Yee feels she is now beginning to do this, but thinks she needs to free herself more from what she sees as the excessive Hong Kong preoccupation with ambition. She wants to go abroad to experience other cultures, to find out how people in them achieve what she sees as a sense of ease in life, of

<sup>18</sup> Soon after our talk, she wrote to let me know that she had been admitted.

<sup>19</sup> See earlier brief description of moral motherhood. Those who initiated the constitution of their career strategies with this account of mothering could actually make a later decision against child-bearing based on what for them were unassailable grounds: unless a woman is prepared to sacrifice her education and employment, she should not have children. In turn, women who want careers in employment must be prepared to sacrifice the pleasures of family. That is how they can remain moral women.

comfort with the self in community with others. It is an alternative that may or may not fit with a marital partnership, but for Ka Yee, the marriage-story is now open-ended. Whatever happens, she has decided on her occupation and on how to pursue a career in it.

At present, the story is sunny. Through a modified Christian lens, it reflects the larger Hong Kong discourse of achievement. But it also carries elements of the account “freedom to consume,” a growing discourse in the advertising of Hong Kong, as elsewhere. As stories told by other, older avoiders of marriage and motherhood show,<sup>20</sup> such an account runs contrary to the actual, lived experience of their careers in Hong Kong. The time squeeze they report in the year 2000 precludes doing much beyond the job, and for them, middle-age is bringing a deep, bone-weariness that leads these older women to question not only earlier marriage-stories, but also the Hong Kong discourse of career itself.

### Reading Hong Kong Marriage-Stories

The three marriage-stories outlined above show that story-making and story-telling change over time, and that the “storying” process is integral to individuals making sense of their worlds and representing themselves as identifiable, rational actors to others. These stories also lend credence to the view that late modernity demands greater reflexivity on the part of social actors, because significant change continually challenges their explanations for experience. How is one to know how to go on when every story, large and small, continually requires adjustment?

Such an existential question cannot be answered here. However, university-educated women’s changing accounts of marriage over the years

1991–2000 do indicate two significant themes for consideration in a historical sociology of Hong Kong: (1) a growing unwillingness to surrender emotional needs for communication and intimacy in order simply to be married and (2) an increasing reluctance to sacrifice self to work or family. Both of these themes have implications for marriage, as well as the career strategies among women they help enable.

Briefly, the stories of Ting Yee, Tin Oi and Ka Yee reveal increasing strain on the presentation of any single, coherent account of marriage in Hong Kong. Each story partakes of a different moral flavor and rests on a different selection from the various public discourses of Hong Kong society. Nowhere are these differences clearer than in the three women’s assessments of the importance of communication in marriage. For Ting Yee, who seeks harmony, a husband can make the major decisions, but he must indicate that he has heard and respects his wife’s feelings. In turn, Tin Oi, who seeks a partnership in which there is a *quid pro quo*: “I will listen to you, if you will listen to me,” a husband is responsible for making himself available for joint discussion and decision-making. In the case of Ka Yee, all bargains are off—she will neither seek to be heard in a certain way nor to be equal half of a partnership—instead, she will take refuge in the provisional nature of each partner’s ability to be present and open to the other. So long as the relationship “works,” that is, as long the couple find each other mutually engaging in terms of shared interests and activities, it will likely last. If there is no actual legal contract, no joint property and no children, in her view, the essentially fluid nature of relationship can prevail, and any hurt engendered by dissolution of a household can be minimized.

In each case, what we call the “marital bargain” rests on a personal clarity about the type and role of communication expected. What is not so clear in each case is the degree of recognition each participant has with respect to the impact of employment on achieving the kind of intimacy desired. But this is actually where a critical social component of marriage enters the picture.

Traditional views of marriage come from a time historically when people with significant

<sup>20</sup>For example, that of En Tze, who I first met as the assistant manager of a large garment factory in 1992. She had a boyfriend at the time, but seemed headed towards the avoidance of marriage and children, invoking the version of moral motherhood noted above. In 1999, still unmarried, she said she had no time for the kind of relationship marriage would involve and was intensely weary with the non-stop nature of her employment (now in computer sales).



access to material goods did not work outside their households or family holdings. Access to resources and standing in the community were guaranteed by the marriage contract itself. But modern marriages reside in a social reality where most work is done in a location over which the individual or family has little control. In fact, most work in the household or any other family enterprise must now be fitted around paid employment. Yet present discourses of marriage, especially those espoused by powerful opinion-makers, continue to disregard these facts, to the point where social researchers must ask the question: Who benefits from such willful ignorance? Certainly not the women (and men) asked to behave as though marriage could still provide the essential social connections for self and community.

In her story, Ting Yee clearly recognizes that something is wrong with this picture. She and her would-be partner must struggle against exhaustion to find any time to build and maintain the kind of intimacy that would sustain a long-term relationship. She has yet to come to a final decision, but it may well be against marriage. She is growing tired of trying to find a mate who can make himself emotionally available. However, Ka Yee has come to the conclusion that the classic discourse of marriage as foundation of family and community is no longer tenable. She has reconstructed her story of marriage accordingly, as a friendly association, but not a lasting bond. Both are younger than Tin Oi; 29 years old in 2000, they are just reaching the age when many Hong Kong women will marry and have children.

An older graduate in her late 30s, Tin Oi did marry earlier, but she has now given up on the creation of a mutually supportive partnership. Instead, we see her look to relationships at work for the emotional sustenance she requires; a deeply satisfying relationship with her new, immediate superior is encouraging her to work even harder. Since she can bring her children with her into the workplace, she maintains her contact with their education and interests with less conflict than some other participants in this research, but she becomes as vulnerable as they if circumstances on the job change. In a certain

respect, her situation mirrors that portrayed by Arlie Hochschild in U.S. households: employment is becoming for many adults the primary source of satisfaction in their lives.<sup>21</sup>

The participants in Hochschild's research report having such crowded, chaotic lives at home and such difficulty achieving satisfaction in any of their intimate relationships that they find their jobs a refuge. Such findings would seem to have huge significance for marriages and families wherever they are reported.

Even in 1992 I found a number of married women with young children in Hong Kong having difficult times with both marriage and job. And it was not because they could not figure out how to meet the needs of both, as they saw them.<sup>22</sup> It was because of time—of the rigid construction of jobs within an unyielding construction of the workday—and the complications introduced to the lack of time for marital interaction by having spouses who were emotionally unavailable, either to their children or to their wives, or both. As a further complicating measure, these men were themselves caught even more tightly in the same constructs of job and workday.

Some may be tempted to blame men for their general lack of availability, and certainly I heard stories throughout my research that indicated men often feel little responsibility for their partners' perceived lack of emotional support. But before we take these stories as expressions of some kind of essential truth, it may be well to consider the world of work into which middle-class males have gone since the industrial revolution—the world of work into which women have now moved—and which, once more, is becoming a sweatshop, albeit an electronic one. It is a world created by men for men, but even more critically, it is a world

<sup>21</sup> Arlie Hochschild (2001).

<sup>22</sup> Most often, social commentators and others view domestic helpers as the answer to women's difficulties at home. But among the women I interviewed, they were not, because domestic helpers either could not, or were not seen as able to, take on the kind of emotion work being a parent involves. That work takes time as well, and they looked to their husbands to share the burden. When a husband would not, or could not, share in this way, no amount of domestic help, even if available, was seen as enough.

created around a story of how “real” men should work, as rational actors unswayed by feeling. That is a story made up by owners and managers, which should make us automatically suspicious of it in certain ways. For it is clear who benefits most from this story, and it is not the millions of ordinary males who are given a sop in such an account, that of being more valuable to promote and pay than females. The beneficiaries of this story are those who have the power to create the economic competition now called capitalism.

The emotional consequences of dealing in an environment of constant competition, constant threat, are clear—only a male who can manage his emotional responses in certain ways can survive. This modern construction of masculinity, therefore, almost guarantees that many men will find it difficult to respond to women’s needs for empathy and support, never mind acknowledge such needs in themselves.<sup>23</sup> It is hardly surprising then, as men are faced by the ever-spiraling competition of the global economy, they find it even more difficult to make themselves available to women discovering these brutal demands as well.

Work is intensifying in Hong Kong, as it is all over North America (the Europeans, particularly the French, are still fighting a resistance). The effect of this intensification expresses itself in human relationships and marriage practices, as indeed it did in nineteenth century Europe.<sup>24</sup>

At the moment, university-educated women in Hong Kong and elsewhere seem like the legendary frogs in the pot. The slow turning up of the gas flame we call globalization has caught them unaware. It has done so because their late-modern capitalist societies encourage the formation of individual career strategies, rather than more collective approaches to work. By the time many

of my participants were able to see that their present career strategies presented difficulties that did not appear in the formulation of the stories that had enabled these strategies, they were facing crises at work—crises that in turn ratcheted up the strains in intimate partnerships.

Is the appropriate conclusion for their stories simply to give up on marriage? For many individual women early in this century, the short answer to this question would seem to be yes. Prescriptive accounts of heroic efforts *women should make* in order to carve out communication skills and time to exercise them will not suffice; as Hong Kong working hours extend, neither sex can make itself available for emotional intimacy. If marriages are to be encouraged and supported as primary vehicles for adult emotional support and for the nurture of children, more must be done to expose both the material conditions of employment in Hong Kong and the pervasive discourses of work used to justify them. These practices must be challenged at their roots, if Hong Kong marriages and families are not to become further victims of what Jurgen Habermas has called “the colonization of the lifeworld.” Or entrapped within what Max Weber termed “the iron cage of bureaucracy.” The human necessity for a social life that sustains both individual and community demands no less.

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<sup>23</sup>See Arlie Hochschild (1975), *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, for the initial analysis of how emotions are constructed for gendered behavior in the workplace.

<sup>24</sup>Perhaps the clearest portrayals of these developments can be found in the literary works of Charles Dickens, but Scott and Tilley’s ground-breaking paper “Women’s Work and the Family in Nineteenth Century Europe,” in Alice Amsden, ed. (1980), *The Economics of Women and Work*, is among the best in social science.

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Rui Yao

Planning for retirement has become a major financial goal for many households. The ability to accumulate adequate wealth to retire depends on prudent action with respect to investment activities. Investment strategies, including financial risk management, play a very important role in the process of wealth accumulation. In the long run, riskier assets have provided higher returns (Siegel 2002). Therefore, households must select between the higher risks associated with riskier assets and the lower rates of return with safer investments. The portfolio decision is dependent on household willingness to assume financial risks, commonly known as financial risk tolerance. Racial and cultural differences may affect household financial risk tolerance.

Households should preserve wealth to achieve short-term goals and at the same time reap adequate returns for intermediate- and long-term financial goals. Financial risk tolerance influences investment decisions, which directly affect a household's ability to accumulate adequate wealth to realize these goals. Households that are not willing to take financial risks may end up with inadequate wealth. On the contrary, too much financial risk may result in unnecessary losses. Previous

research has provided evidence that a household's demographic characteristics, economic characteristics, and expectations of the future have an effect on its financial risk tolerance.

Race is a key demographic characteristic of a household. Of the total US population, 4.2 % are Asians (U.S. Census Bureau 2007), and about one-fourth of them report they are Chinese. A vast volume of research has been conducted on consumer financial well-being; however, the majority of previous studies analyzing racial differences in financial risk tolerance have focused on the comparison between White and non-White households (e.g. Bertaut and Starr-McCluer 2000; Zhong and Xiao 1995) and Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics (e.g. Plath and Stevenson 2000; Yao et al. 2005). One reason for not including Asian households as one separate racial/ethnic group may be the limitation of available datasets. For example, Yao et al. (2005) employed the Survey of Consumer Finances public use datasets, which combine various racial/ethnic groups into one category classified as "other." This category includes Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Households in this group represent many different cultures; combining them into one category does not generate meaningful results, and therefore, many studies excluded these households (e.g. Bucks et al. 2006).

Asian Americans are a greatly diversified group, who are from countries such as Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Laos, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Although

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they share similar cultures in “Confucian Dynamism” (Hofstede and Bond 1988), each of these countries is unique in language, life style, cultural values, and beliefs (Kim et al. 2001). This study focuses on picturing the financial risk tolerance of Chinese Americans, the largest Asian American group, and analyzing the factors that affect their financial risk tolerance.

## Literature Review

Existing differences in financial well-being of households with various racial/ethnic backgrounds have been documented. Using the 2000 Census data, Sharpe and Abdel-Ghany (2006) compared the income level of six Asian groups in the USA. Compared with White households, Japanese American households had significantly more income and Chinese, Filipinos, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrant households had less. Cobb-Clark and Hildebrand (2006) employed six Survey of Income and Program Participation datasets to study the wealth of US households. The authors concluded that immigrant households from European and Asian countries had substantially more wealth than average immigrant households. However, the Census data consistently shows that Asian American households are more likely to be in poverty than non-Hispanic White households (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2005; Reeves and Bennett 2004).

This wealth inequality between races may be due to the composition of wealth (Keister 2000). Different assets offer different combinations of financial risks and rates of return, and therefore, households with different asset allocations may end up with various levels of wealth. Stocks are generally riskier than other investments, however; in the long run, they have historically produced higher returns (Ibbotson Associates 2006). Research on the ownership of risky assets (e.g. Bertaut and Starr-McCluer 2000; Haliassos and Bertaut 1995; Zhong and Xiao 1995) has found that Whites were more likely to own stocks than their non-White counterparts and that Whites also had higher holdings of stocks and bonds. Black households were found to hold a higher

proportion of low-yield financial assets and a lower proportion of stocks and bonds (Plath and Stevenson 2000). Coleman (2003) examined the ratio of risky assets divided by net worth and found that, all else being equal, Hispanics allocated a lower proportion of net worth to risky assets than Whites.

Race and ethnicity have been found to affect household attitude towards taking financial risks and their actual risk-taking behavior. In a study of the determinants of financial risk tolerance, Grable and Joo (1999) found that white-collar clerical workers who were White were less risk tolerant than their non-White counterparts. Coleman (2003) studied household willingness to take financial risks and their actual investment behavior. It was found that Blacks and Hispanics were less willing to take financial risks than otherwise similar Whites. The study by Yao et al. (2005) found that Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to be willing to take no financial risks; however, Hispanics were also more likely to be willing to take substantial financial risks than their otherwise similar White counterparts.

Irwin (1993) asserted that attitudes affect behavior. Consequently, willingness to tolerate financial risks should influence a household's investment behavior. In other words, financial risk tolerance plays a critical role in household wealth accumulation and achievement of financial goals. This is confirmed by previous research (e.g. Campbell 2006; Snelbecker et al. 1990), which concluded that risk tolerance was an important factor that influences financial behavior.

Although race and ethnicity have been consistently found to have an effect on financial risk tolerance, minority groups, especially Asian American households, are inadequately studied. In the literature, minority groups with an Asian background have been combined with other racial/ethnic groups or even ignored (e.g. Bryant 1986; Getter 2006; Olney 1998). It is erroneous and misleading to assume that the simple assignment to a racial/ethnic group affects household financial well-being. A more in-depth discussion of the reasons behind the visible racial/ethnic classification is necessary. The differences in financial well-being



that are claimed, by some researchers, to be race/ethnicity related may be due to other factors hidden behind the race/ethnicity variable. Cultures and beliefs that are associated with race/ethnicity may be more likely to affect an individual's financial behavior, which have direct impact on his economic well-being. Knowledge of which factors truly affect financial risk tolerance is a step forward in understanding how best to propose strategies that strengthen financial risk tolerance for Chinese Americans.

Controlling for race and ethnicity, household demographic characteristics, economic characteristics and expectations have been found to play an important role in household financial risk tolerance. Most prior research found that age was negatively related to financial risk tolerance (Bakshi and Chen 1994; Morin and Suarez 1983; Palsson 1996). However, some discovered that the effect of age on financial risk tolerance was not linear (Plath and Stevenson 2000; Riley and Chow 1992). Previous research agreed that women were less risk tolerant than men (e.g. Jianakoplos and Bernasek 1998; Hariharan et al. 2000; Hartog et al. 2002).

Prior research showed that risk tolerance increased with income and wealth (Hartog et al. 2002; Riley and Chow 1992). Hinz et al. (1997) and Grable and Joo (1999) found income to be positively related to financial risk tolerance. Gollier (2000) concluded that being subject to a liquidity constraint makes individuals less willing to bear risks.

Grable (2000) found that those with more positive economic expectations were more risk tolerant than those with lower expectations. Hariharan et al. (2000) found that the proportion of financial assets invested in stocks and bonds increased with the investment time horizon.

by the St. Petersburg Paradox, people would not pay an infinite price to play a gamble that has an infinite expected amount of return. Risk aversion plays a role in utility functions. Bernoulli Utility Function is often used to refer to a decision-maker's utility over wealth. When the outcomes are uncertain, the expected utility function is dealing with decision-making under uncertainty. The Expected Utility Theory (EUT) states that the decision maker chooses between uncertain prospects by comparing their expected utility.

## Risk Aversion and Risk Tolerance

Based on the form of Bernoulli utility functions, people's attitudes towards risk can be categorized into three groups: risk-averse, risk-neutral, and risk-loving. As stated by Friedman and Savage (1948), risk aversion implies that when facing choices with equal returns, people tend to choose the less-risky alternative. Risk-averse behavior is demonstrated by a concave Bernoulli utility function. The most famous measures of risk aversion were introduced by Pratt (1964) and Arrow (1965). Pratt (1964) developed the measure of absolute risk aversion and demonstrated that more risk-averse individuals would invest a smaller amount of wealth in risky assets. Arrow (1965) derived the measure of relative risk aversion and suggested that individuals with a higher level of risk aversion would invest a smaller proportion of their wealth into risky assets.

Barsky et al. (1997) defined risk tolerance as the inverse of risk aversion. Historical rates of return fluctuate around their mean. Different types of assets show different magnitudes of such fluctuation (risk). Different individuals have different tolerance levels toward risk. Some people can tolerate a high level of risk (or have low risk aversion), and others can tolerate less risk (or have high risk aversion).

## Theoretical Framework

### Expected Utility Theory

If people maximize expected values, their investment portfolio would consist of 100 % of the asset with the highest mean return. However, as shown

### Hypotheses

As demonstrated by Pratt (1964) and Arrow (1965), wealth provides utility. The hypotheses in

this study are based on the assumptions that (1) people are rational; (2) they seek to maximize their wealth; and (3) they are generally risk averse.

Age should have a negative effect on financial risk tolerance because as people age, they have less time to make up possible losses. On average, females live longer than males and, therefore, should tolerate more financial risks in order to receive a higher investment return to fund their living. Individuals with related children under age 18 may be less risk tolerant because their decision on financial risk taking will affect more family members. It may be more painful to make others deal with a reduced living standard than to personally accept it for oneself.

Since liquid assets provide financial flexibility in case of investment losses, households with an adequate emergency fund should be more risk tolerant than those without. Non-financial assets (except own home) should function as a second-tier financial cushion in case of investment losses. Therefore, the level of non-financial assets is expected to have a positive effect on financial risk tolerance. Income should positively influence financial risk tolerance. Apart from offering a financial backup when investment losses occur, higher income is related to lower wage replacement rate of Social Security and less opportunity to reap benefits from different kinds of retirement accounts. Households with more income should take more financial risks in order to receive higher returns to meet their needs.

When individuals expect the economy to be better in the future, they should be more willing to take financial risks to take advantage of the market. Individuals with a longer investment time horizon should be more risk tolerant since they have a longer time to recover from possible investment losses.

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## Empirical Methodology

### The SCF Measure of Risk Tolerance

In this chapter, financial risk tolerance is defined as the willingness to assume financial risk in order to obtain a certain level of financial return.

The Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF) question on willingness to take financial risk is:

Which of the statements on this page comes closest to the amount of financial risk that you and your spouse/partner are willing to take when you save or make investments?

1. Take substantial financial risks expecting to earn substantial returns.
2. Take above average financial risks expecting to earn above average returns.
3. Take average financial risks expecting to earn average returns.
4. Not willing to take any financial risks.

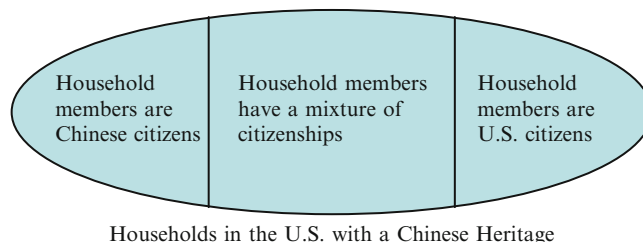
This measure is based on respondents' beliefs rather than their behavior, which is more reasonable than behavior-based measures because households without investment assets at present can still specify the level of financial risk tolerance they would like to take if they had money to invest.

### The Concept of Chinese American Households

Households currently living in the USA with a Chinese heritage include three major categories: households whose members are Chinese citizens; households with a mixture of citizenships but with a Chinese heritage; and households whose members are US citizens but with a Chinese heritage (Fig. 30.1). Technically, Chinese American is a term that is used to refer to US citizens with a Chinese heritage. However, during any data collection process, respondents are usually asked to self-identify their race but not their nationality. It is not possible to differentiate between Chinese individuals who are US citizens and those who are not.

In the 2000 US Census survey, all respondents, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, were asked to select one or more of the race categories: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White (<http://www.census.gov/population/www/soc-demo/race/racefactcb.html>). In its 1993 publication "We the Americans: Asians," the US Census used the term "Asian Americans" to describe

**Fig. 30.1** Households in the USA with a Chinese heritage



Asians in the USA, including Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Asian Indians, Japanese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, and Thai (U.S. Census Bureau 1993).

Following the same method, the term “Chinese American households” is used, in this chapter, to refer to households currently living in the USA with a Chinese heritage, regardless of their citizenship and immigration status.

## Data

A survey was conducted by selecting relevant questions from the SCF. Authorization from the Federal Reserve Board was obtained to use these questions. Willingness to take financial risks was the major question asked in the survey. Other information collected includes household demographic characteristics (e.g., age, marital status), economic characteristics (e.g., income, assets, debts), and future expectations (e.g., self-perceived life expectancy).

Data were collected from Chinese households located in five Midwestern states in the Northwest Central Region, including Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The two largest cities (most populated without adjusting for area) in each of the five states were selected. The DEX white pages online phone book (<http://www.dexknows.com/>) was used to identify households with a Chinese last name listed. There were a total of 1,957 Chinese American households identified in these states. Every other household was selected and 979 phone calls were made to invite them to participate in the study. A \$10 Wal-Mart gift card was offered as an incentive to participate.

Two hundred and forty-two households could not be reached due to reasons such as a number not in service, number disconnected, wrong number, fax number, no answer, and number always busy. Households that could not be reached due to no answer or a busy line were contacted two more times at a different time on a different day. Phone calls were continuously made to randomly selected new households until a total of 979 households were contacted. A total of 341 households agreed to participate in the research over the phone. One survey was mailed to each of these households, from which, 158 completed surveys were received. Among these completed surveys, nine did not provide vital information such as level of income and market value of home. These surveys were not used in the analysis. One respondent indicated an annual income of \$2 million, which did not have significant impact on the multivariate results and therefore was included in the analyses. As a result, the total number of respondents in this study was 149.

## Variables

The dependent variable was the SCF measure of financial risk tolerance. Due to the small number of respondents, the four choices of the dependent variable (substantial risk, above average risk, average risk, and no risk) were categorized into two groups: no risk and some risk. Independent variables include household demographic characteristics, economic characteristics, and respondent expectations.

Demographic characteristics included age, gender, and presence of related child(ren) under 18. Age was categorized into three groups: less than

35; 35–49; and 50 and older. Marital status was not included in the logistic model due to inadequate number of respondents in the categories of never married, separated or divorced, and widowed. Education was not included in the multivariate analysis due to its high correlation with income and amount of non-financial assets.

Economic characteristics included: emergency fund adequacy, amount of non-financial assets, and income. A household was considered to have an adequate level of emergency fund if it has at least 3 months' income saved in the form of liquid assets (e.g., cash, checking, savings, and money market accounts). Levels of non-financial assets and income were used as continuous variables. Employment status was excluded from the logistic model due to insufficient number of respondents in the retired, not currently working, and self-employed categories. Home ownership was not included in the logistic analysis due to its high correlation with age, income, and the number of children under age 18.

Expectation variables included expectation of the economic performance in the future and investment time horizon. Respondents who expected the economy to be better than the past five years were grouped together and those who expected the economy to be worse or the same as the past five years were put into another group. Investment time horizon had three categories: less than five years, 5–10 years, and longer than 10 years. Expectation of a substantial amount of inheritance or asset transfers in the future was not included in the logistic model due to the small number of respondents who expected such assets.

## Statistical Methods

A logistic model was used in the multivariate analysis. The model examines the effect of

independent variables on the probability for respondents to take no financial risk or at least some financial risk, whether substantial, above average, or average.

There were four levels of the willingness to take financial risks. Respondents who were willing to take a substantial amount of financial risks in order to receive substantial amount of financial returns may be significantly different from those who were only willing to take average financial risk to obtain average amount of return. This binary measure of willingness to take financial risks can only differentiate whether households take any financial risk or not at all; for those who expressed a willingness to take some financial risk, this method cannot distinguish between different levels of financial risk tolerance. Therefore, some useful information endogenous to the choice of financial risks was not used. However, due to the small number of respondents, the binary logistic model was the best that could be used.

## Results

### Characteristics of Sample Households

As shown in Table 30.1, the age of the respondents ranged from 24 to 77 years old, with the mean and the median age being 42. Of the total respondents, only six did not receive a bachelor's degree (Table 30.2); 20 indicated that their highest education level was a bachelor's degree; 123 received a graduate degree. There were 45 female respondents and 104 male respondents. The majority of the respondents (88.6 %) were married or living with a partner; 6.0 % were separated or divorced; 5.4 % were never married; and none of them were widowed. About three quarters (72.5 %) of the total respondents had at least one related child under age 18 living with them.

**Table 30.1** Age, non-financial assets, and annual income of respondents

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median
Age	24	77	42	42
Non-financial assets	\$0	\$500,000	\$39,312	\$20,000
Annual income	\$10,900	\$2,000,000	\$105,976	\$85,000

**Table 30.2** Financial risk tolerance by respondent characteristics

	No risk	Average risk	Above average risk	Substantial risk
<b>Education of respondents</b>				
Less than High School Diploma	100 % 1	0 % 0	0 % 0	0 % 0
High School Diploma	100 % 3	0 % 0	0 % 0	0 % 0
Associate Degree or Some College	100 % 2	0 % 0	0 % 0	0 % 0
Bachelor's Degree	30.0 % 6	55.0 % 11	10.0 % 2	5.0 % 1
Graduate Degree	13.8 % 17	43.9 % 54	32.5 % 40	9.8 % 12
<b>Gender of respondents</b>				
Male	15.4 % 16	43.3 % 45	28.9 % 30	12.5 % 13
Female	28.9 % 13	44.4 % 20	26.7 % 12	0 % 0
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married/living with partner	18.2 % 24	47.0 % 62	28.0 % 37	6.8 % 9
Divorced or separated	33.3 % 3	33.3 % 3	22.2 % 2	11.1 % 1
Never married	18.2 % 2	47.0 % 0	28.0 % 3	6.8 % 3
<b>Presence of related children &lt;18</b>				
Yes	19.4 % 21	48.2 % 52	29.6 % 32	2.8 % 3
No	19.5 % 8	31.7 % 13	24.4 % 10	24.4 % 10
<b>Emergency fund adequacy</b>				
Yes	18.9 % 10	50.9 % 27	18.9 % 10	11.3 % 6
No	19.8 % 19	39.6 % 38	33.3 % 32	7.3 % 7
<b>Employment status</b>				
Working for someone else	17.9 % 24	43.3 % 58	29.9 % 40	9.0 % 12
Self-employed	50.0 % 4	37.5 % 3	0 % 0	12.5 % 1
Not currently working	16.7 % 1	50.0 % 3	33.3 % 2	0 % 0
Retired	0 % 0	100 % 1	0 % 0	0 % 0
<b>Home ownership</b>				
Homeowner	17.4 % 21	45.5 % 55	29.8 % 36	7.4 % 9
Renter	28.6 % 8	35.7 % 10	21.4 % 6	14.3 % 4

(continued)



**Table 30.2** (continued)

	No risk	Average risk	Above average risk	Substantial risk
Expecting substantial amount of inheritance or asset transfer				
Yes	0 %	66.7 %	33.3 %	0 %
	0	4	2	0
No	20.3 %	42.7 %	28.0 %	9.1 %
	29	61	40	13
Expectation of economy performance				
Better	20.0 %	32.7 %	30.9 %	16.4 %
	11	18	17	9
Same as now	21.2 %	48.5 %	27.3 %	3.0 %
	3	32	18	2
Worse	14.3 %	53.6 %	25.0 %	7.1 %
	4	15	7	2
Investment time horizon				
Next few months	60.0 %	20.0 %	20.0 %	0 %
	6	2	2	0
Next year	18.2 %	54.6 %	27.3 %	0 %
	2	6	3	0
Next few years	20.8 %	52.8 %	22.6 %	3.8 %
	11	28	12	2
Next 5–10 years	25.0 %	42.9 %	28.6 %	3.6 %
	7	12	8	1
Longer than 10 years	6.4 %	36.2 %	36.2 %	21.3 %
	3	17	17	10
Total	19.5 %	43.6 %	28.2 %	8.7 %
	29	65	42	13

Only one-third of the total respondents (35.6 %) had at least three months' income saved in a liquid form. One of the respondents was retired; six (4.0 %) were not working at the time of the survey; 5.4 % were self-employed; and 89.9 % were working for someone else. Homeowners counted for 81.2 % of the total respondents. Six (4.0 %) respondents were expecting a large inheritance or asset transfer in the future. Around one-fifth (18.8 %) of the respondents specified that compared to the past five years, they expected the US economy to perform worse in the next five years; 36.9 % expressed the opposite expectation; and 44.3 % indicated that the economy is going to perform about the same as the past five years. In terms of their family's saving and spending, 6.7 % of the respondents indicated that they were planning for the next few months; 7.4 % were planning for the next year; 35.6 % were planning

for the next few years; 18.8 % were planning for the next 5–10 years; and 31.5 % had a horizon of longer than 10 years.

Table 30.1 shows that the mean non-financial assets was \$39,312. Total household income averaged at \$105,976, and the median was \$85,000. The distribution of income is highly skewed because one respondent indicated a total annual income of \$2,000,000. The next highest income level was \$310,000.

Twenty-nine of the 149 (19.5 %) respondents indicated in their survey that they were not willing to take any financial risk; 43.6 % were willing to take average financial risk in order to earn average returns; 28.2 % expressed a willingness to take above average financial risk in order to earn above average returns; and 8.7 % indicated that they were willing to take substantial financial risk in order to earn substantial returns.

Controlled Results

After controlling for other variables, being a male had a significant effect on the willingness to take financial risks (Table 30.3). All else being the same, males were twice as likely to take financial risks as female respondents.

As shown in Table 30.3, both annual income and amount of non-financial assets had a significant impact on financial risk-taking. Those with a higher level of household income in the past year were more likely to take some financial risks than those with a lower level of household income. Compared to otherwise similar counterparts, those who had more non-financial assets were more likely to be willing to assume financial risks.

Investment time horizon had a significant positive effect on financial risk tolerance. Respondents who identified an investment time horizon of longer than 10 years were 2.4 times as likely to take some financial risks as those who selected a medium length of horizon (5–10 years). However, the likelihood to take financial risks of those who

indicated a short investment time horizon (less than five years) was not significantly different from those with a medium length of investment time horizon.

Summary and Discussion

Earning more income, having more non-financial assets, and having an investment time horizon of longer than 10 years had a significant positive effect on the willingness to take some financial risks. These results are consistent with the hypotheses. Being a male had a positive effect on financial risk tolerance, which is consistent with the findings in previous research (e.g. Guiso et al. 1996; Hariharan et al. 2000; Hartog et al. 2002; Jianakoplos and Bernasek 1998; Powell and Ansic 1997; Yao and Hanna 2005), but inconsistent with the hypothesis. All other things being equal, females, who are expected to live longer than males on average, should take more financial risks in order to obtain higher returns to support their consumption. There might be a few reasons why females are not so willing to take financial risks; lack of knowledge and experience of investing and taking financial risks may be one of them (Campbell 2006). The results of this study suggest that females should learn more about available investment assets and their associated financial risks so that financial risks do not seem to be so terrifying.

Those with at least a three-month income saved in liquid forms were expected to be more willing to take financial risks than otherwise similar respondents who do not have adequate emergency funds saved. However, this is not confirmed by the logistic results. Households that do not have such assets should not consider taking financial risks until their emergency funds are adequately saved. Without a sufficient amount of emergency fund, a household is vulnerable to unexpected risks such as loss of employment.

Having at least one related child under the age of 18 living in the household was hypothesized to have a negative effect on financial risk tolerance. However this hypothesis was rejected by

**Table 30.3** Logistic analysis of the likelihood of taking some financial risks

Parameter	Some risk	
	Coefficient	Odds ratio
Intercept	−0.8097	
Age 35–49: reference group: age <35	1.3517	3.864
Age >=50	1.3149	3.724
Male	0.6792*	1.972
Presence of related children under age 18	0.0170	1.017
Emergency fund adequate	0.2701	1.310
Non-financial assets	0.0000*	1.000
Annual income	0.0000**	1.000
Expect the economy to be worse	−0.0878	0.916
Planning for <5 years	0.1210	1.129
Planning for >10 years	0.8824*	2.417
Concordance	83.1	
Chi-square test of the likelihood ratio	35.0612	$p=0.0001$

Note: \* $p<0.05$ , \*\* $p<0.01$

the multivariate results. In other words, whether or not they have such children living in the household, the majority of respondents were willing to take some financial risks (80.5 % of total households, as shown by Table 30.2). Children's education expenditure may be related to this result. Xiao and Fan (2002) found that Chinese were more likely than Americans to save for children and for higher education expenses may be one of the reasons. In China, average household expenditure on education has been increasing at an average rate of 29.3 % per year since 1990, much higher than the increase of household income (Li 2000). It was also found that on average, Chinese households spend 15.1 % of their income on education. However, in the USA, the K-12 education is free. Even if an investment loss should occur, it is not likely to affect young children's education. Therefore, coming from a country where education is expensive, immigrant households from China may be more likely to take some financial risk and invest for other goals.

Table 30.2 showed that the majority (80.5 %) of Chinese Americans were willing to take at least some financial risks. This percentage is much higher than the 59.4 % of Whites, 43.0 % of Blacks, and 36.1 % of Hispanics, found by Yao et al. (2005). This is consistent with the findings by Fan and Xiao (2006), which concluded that Chinese were more risk tolerant than Americans. The traditional belief that Chinese may be more risk averse (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982) needs to be revisited. The fact that many factors that should affect household financial risk tolerance did not have a significant effect after controlling for other variables indicates that Chinese American households may not be well informed on what financial risk is and the appropriate amount of risk to take.

## Implications

The inequality of wealth may be an unresolved issue (Keister 2000). However, knowledge of financial risks, which directly affect one's wealth accumulation, can be improved through educa-

**Table 30.4** Hypotheses' test results

Variable	Hypothesized effect	Actual effect
Age	–	NS
Male	–	+
Presence of related children under age 18	–	NS
Adequate emergency fund	+	NS
Non-financial assets	+	+
Annual income	+	+
Expect the economy to be better	+	NS
Planning for <5 years	–	NS
Planning for >10 years	+	+

*Note:* + positive effect, – negative effect, NS not significant

tion and training that is targeted at minority groups such as Chinese Americans. The consistent finding of males being more risk tolerant than females suggests that such education is needed whether or not there is a genetic difference in risk taking between men and women. Financial planners, as the fiduciary of their clients, should educate their Chinese American clients regarding the outcomes related to inappropriate financial risk taking and help them select the right amount of financial risk to take in order to achieve their financial goals. In this study, emergency fund adequacy was found to be unrelated to financial risk tolerance of Chinese American households (Table 30.4). Those who do not have adequate emergency fund saved should be informed that enough emergency fund should be in place before investing in risky assets such as stocks.

Immigration status may affect household financial risk tolerance. Immigrants with a temporary student visa or work visa are likely to have a lower financial risk tolerance due to the uncertainty of their future: whether they would stay in the USA or not. Unlike those individuals, Chinese immigrants who are permanent residents or have a US citizenship may be more comfortable in taking financial risks because they are assured that they do not have to leave the USA due to immigration reasons. Masuo et al. (2004) claimed that the degree of affinity to a certain culture affects the money attitudes and beliefs of young immigrants.

Rhine and Greene (2006) found that the length of living in the USA had a significant effect on the banking status of immigrants: those who had lived in the USA for a longer period of time were found to be less likely to be unbanked. Kwon et al. (2004) concluded that the degree of acculturation affected Asian immigrant household economic well-being. Compared to first-generation immigrants, Chinese Americans who were born and raised in the USA may be more acquainted with American values and beliefs and, therefore, may have different attitudes towards financial risks that directly affect their economic well-being.

This study has several limitations. One is the lack of knowledge on respondent immigration status and their culture affinity; therefore, whether these factors contributed to some of the statistical insignificance of controlled results cannot be determined. Another limitation is that samples were chosen according to their last name listed on the DEX white pages online phone book. Households with no landlines and households that list their non-Chinese member's last name in the phone book could not be identified nor contacted. Nonetheless, this study takes the first step into the investigation of Chinese American households' financial risk tolerance.

The Chinese American population is the biggest Asian American group, which is growing fast (Bernstein 2004). This group has enormous needs in financial services that could be better served by the financial services industry in the USA. Future research should compare Chinese American households and households with other racial/ethnic backgrounds, investigate the similarities and differences in financial risk tolerance between these groups, and provide in-depth understanding of these similarities and differences in order to help households improve their economic well-being by taking the appropriate level of financial risk.

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Tobey Yung Wai-ming

This chapter deals with gender equality in the marital relationship. To Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998), equality in this relationship is indicated by the degree of division of housework and distribution of decision-making power.

Has the marital relationship in contemporary society attained equality? The concept of “men outside, women inside” was rooted in traditional Chinese society. The man had to go out and work, but at home he was the master. Throughout history, almost all State leaders have been male. Living in a patriarchal society, the Chinese followed the principle of “men outside, women inside” as the traditional mode of division of labor.

When New China was established, Chairman Mao vigorously promoted gender equality, and the status of women was raised by increased opportunities of work and education. However, gender equality, as proposed by Mao, was only applied to the public domain of work, and it failed to provide for gender equality in the family. Although the social status of women in society has been greatly enhanced, the concept of men being superior and women being inferior has not yet broken down. The notion of the wife serving the husband is still taken for granted. Women, on one hand, have to go out to work and, on the other hand, have to take on the heavy burden of taking

care of children and housework—just like before. As described by Hochschild’s (1989) concept of the “second shift,” although women have begun to immerse themselves in various social and economic activities, the “duty” of taking care of the family still “belongs” to women. This is actually a universal phenomenon. As Crowley (1996) observes, even though women’s status in various respects is already different from before, one fact remains unchanged, that is the top priority of women is still the family, they being the inevitable persons responsible for taking care of the housework and family members.

What is heartening is that recently there have been a lot of reports on the famous brand of “the Shanghai man.”<sup>1</sup> According to these reports, Shanghai is a place where women are liberated, because Shanghai men are willing to let go of their male identity after work, to take on housework, tidy up things, and wait for their wife to come home for dinner. Surveys and interviews have pointed out that Shanghai men are educated and courteous, and, more importantly, they know how to cook a good meal and do housework; they are thus the ideal marital partner of Hong Kong

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<sup>1</sup>In a book titled *Don't Gossip about Shanghainese* 《別拿上海人說事兒》(in Chinese), many famous Chinese writers, such as Wang Anyi, Jiang Liping, Pan Xiangli, Chen Chun, Zhang Yuanshan, and Ma Shanglong, approve of and praise Shanghai men, deeming them to be a “prestigious brand.” The male characteristics of this brand are “pragmatic, careful, civilized and dutiful,” and it is a brand pursued by Hong Kong and Taiwan women.

and Taiwanese women. And they are crowned with the title of “the new good man of the twenty-first century.”

Shanghai man—Dishwasher type

Domestic index: ★★★★★ Romantic index: ★★★

Shanghai men are qualified husbands; their typical image is: Go home, take off their suit, put on an apron, and cook a good meal for their wife and children.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of report has made the Shanghai man Mr. Wonderful in the eyes of the public. It has started a new mass fervor for Shanghai men and, more importantly, it is a symbol of the all-round practice of gender equality. To Massey et al. (1995), men’s concept of gender equality is directly related to their participation in housework. The more men feel the need to embrace equality, the more they participate in housework. Does Shanghai men’s willingness to share housework indicate that gender equality has already gone beyond the public sphere of work and penetrated the private sphere of the family?

This chapter will raise and attempt to answer three questions. First, why do Shanghai men possess such a unique characteristic? Second, is this kind of uniqueness applicable to many Shanghai men? Third, what is the social significance of this example of gender equality in Shanghai families?

## Methodology

This research has acquired data through in-depth interviews and observations conducted in 2004. Since the research topic is family, and family issues are usually not easily revealed to outsiders, if the research is conducted by way of closed questions, as in the form of a questionnaire, it will be relatively difficult to get genuinely revealing answers, because the interviewees will tend to offer superficial answers when responding to questionnaires and try to present a positive

family image, just like the “happy family game” described by Laing (1971). Searching open questions may be followed up on the spot and more profound data can be obtained. On the other hand, since family issues usually cannot be split up for separate discussions and everything is linked with everything else, the interviewees, given open questions, will more easily talk about their family stories, and certain “digressions” may uncover more insights.

Apart from in-depth interviews, the research is also supplemented with observations for the purpose of validating the narrative of the interviewee. For instance, in one of the families, the man stressed that men and women should be equal, that the old concept of men being superior and women being inferior no longer exists, that women would not allow male chauvinism either. But some time after ten one evening, while he was playing video games at home, the husband asked his wife to go out and buy cigarettes for him. This behavior was obviously under the influence of the deep-rooted idea that the husband may order the wife around. These trivial matters can only be known through observation. In order to comprehend gender equality in Shanghai families, the unit of the research in this article is the family. Because the nuclear family is becoming more and more common, the family unit is in turn based on the marital relationship. Altogether, the research comprised interviews with six families, and the interviewees were all couples. There were 12 interviewees altogether, all born and raised in Shanghai. The personal data of the interviewees are shown in Table 31.1.

When the fifth group of interviewees was interviewed, the author discovered that little new content appeared in the interview, that the process of interview had already reached a saturation point. So altogether six families were interviewed in this study.

Since the location of the research is Shanghai, a certain difficulty for me in contacting the interviewees was to be expected. The smooth progress of the interviews and observations relied on a strong interpersonal network. My mother is from Shanghai, so it was in fact relatively easy for me

<sup>2</sup>“Fashion Index of Men of Eight Major Cities,” Beijing Youth, 6.6.2006, qtd. Fashion Channel ([http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/fashion/2003-06/13/content\\_918477.htm](http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/fashion/2003-06/13/content_918477.htm)).

**Table 31.1** Interviewees in Shanghai families

Family	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Did the author observe the family?
The Hua family	Mr. Hua	Male	66	Retired	Yes
	Mrs. Hua	Female	63	Retired	
The Song family	Mr. Song	Male	57	Retired	Yes
	Mrs. Song	Female	55	Retired	
The Liu family	Mr. Liu	Male	30	Civil servant	Yes
	Mrs. Liu	Female	27	Teacher	
The Chen family	Mr. Chen	Male	27	Insurance	No
	Mrs. Chen	Female	25	Secretary	
The Long family	Mr. Long	Male	56	Computer technician	No
	Mrs. Long	Female	50	Manager	
The Wang family	Mr. Wang	Male	25	Salesperson	No
	Mrs. Wang	Female	23	Telephone receptionist	

to find potential interviewees. As pointed out by quite a few scholars (Chan and Tong 2000; Xin and Pearce 1996), in Chinese society, *guanxi* is important and conducive to business activities and the exchange of profits. In this field study, I deeply recognized that the way the Chinese handle their affairs is closely connected with the repayment of favors and *guanxi* (ties and connections).

## The Literature

The focus of this chapter is the change of gender roles in the family, i.e., the connection between Shanghai men becoming the main person in charge of housework, on one hand, and gender equality, on the other hand. Apart from sociological researches and theories, references used in this chapter also consist of certain non-sociological literature, including newspapers, magazines, and some books purchased in Shanghai. These non-sociological documents can provide some folk statements which will, to a certain extent, help explain the current situation of Shanghai families.

## Gender Roles and Equality in the Family

It is an almost universal phenomenon that the dirty work at home is undertaken by women.

Western literature has all along pointed out that it is most difficult to attain equality between men and women in the family. As noted by Perkins and DeMeis (1996), especially after the first child arrives, the division of housework tends to be distributed according to the traditional gender roles, with the woman being responsible for housework and the man being responsible for economic activities. It is this kind of inertia that makes women feel unequal. DeMaris and Longmore (1996) point out that willingness on the part of the man to share housework has a symbolic significance for equality between men and women. This is because, when housework is shared by both parties, the impression that one party (usually the woman) is serving the other party will not be engendered, and it will show the relationship between both parties to be equal. It can thus be seen that western scholars think that willingness on the part of the man to share housework and thereby to dispel the shadow of traditional gender roles is an important factor leading to gender equality. Blair and Johnson (1992) point out that according to traditional gender roles, men also share housework, but they only take on housework that requires the operation of machines or physical labor. Blair and Johnson emphasize that unless men are willing to share dirty housework such as cleaning and cooking, gender equality cannot be enhanced. They unequivocally argue

that men have to break out of traditional gender roles and engage in housework like cleaning and cooking before equality between men and women can be achieved.

Chinese scholars agree with their western colleagues. In the book, *Qualitative Studies of Chinese Marriage*, the authors, Xu Anqi and Ye Wenzhen (1999), point out that whether a couple feel equal to each other is directly related to gender roles, that is, when the wife feels that she shares a double role equally with her husband, and they make family decisions on a basis of mutual consultation, an equal relationship will be formed. In analyzing the degree of satisfaction with their marriage on the part of the couple, gender role differences (including whether the husband undertakes more housework, whether the husband is tolerant and enlightened, whether the wife possesses real power within the family, etc.) occupy an important position. The more positive the answers, the more equal the relationship, and the higher the degree of satisfaction with the marriage. The authors also point out that in order to attain equality between men and women, the husband has to give up preconceptions about traditional gender roles like "men outside, women inside," and actively take part in housework, in order to complement the wife and lessen the pressure on her.

Both western and Chinese scholars have theorized that, when men are willing to take part in all kinds of housework and break out of the restrictions of traditional gender roles, equality between men and women can be put into effect. As the argument that Shanghai men are willing to shoulder housework has been popular since the 1990s, I gained access to a great deal of data and information for reference, and the findings of most researches are opposite to what is described on the street. In the book, *Love and Marriage of the Chinese at the Turn of the Century*, the author, Xu Anqi (1997), devotes an entire chapter to love and marriage of the Shanghainese, mainly to expose the false theory that "Shanghai men are housewives!". The author mentions certain market surveys with the following findings: In 90 % of the families, the wife dominates daily family life; in

80 % of the families, domestic tasks like cooking and washing are all done by men. These are in fact myths concocted by reporters who are always hunting for something sensational and curious to write about. Xu Anqi's research points out that the responsibility of housework continues to fall on the shoulders of the wife in most cases. Then, regionally speaking, does Shanghai have more househusbands than other cities? As shown by the data, the proportion of husbands mainly responsible for housework or responsible for more housework is 13.1 % for Shanghai, 12.4 % for Chengdu, 11.9 % for Nanjing, 11.7 % for Beijing. So the differences are small. On the other hand, in terms of sharing housework equally, the proportions in Chengdu, Nanjing, Beijing and Guangzhou are all higher than in Shanghai, and the biggest difference amounts to 11.8 %. Xu Anqi thereby refutes the myth of Shanghai men "taking care of the inside," and points out that, since obviously most Shanghainese couples are in employment, no one party can spend much time on domestic matters. Moreover, according to her research, the numbers of couples who admit that the husband is busier at work are twice those who admit that the wife is busier at work.

In their *A Research Report of Chinese Marriages*, Xu Anqi and Ye Wenzhen (2002) conduct an in-depth research on the participation of the husband and the wife in housework and in family decision-making. The division of domestic labor between the man and the wife has not yet reached complete equality; the wife is still the main undertaker of housework. In urban families, the housework undertaken by the wife is 4.6 times than that by the husband. In respect of everyday economic management, the wife's portion is also 4.6 times that of the husband. These two pieces of research data are both different from what I gathered by reading newspapers.

## Equilibrium and Equality

Different scholars have all along interpreted gender equality differently. Gender equality between the sexes is inseparable from the

sharing of housework; mutual adaptation and coordination between husband and wife is a crucial part of the journey to equality. The discourse on equality between men and women necessarily involves two concepts: equilibrium and equality. Equilibrium refers to both parties reaching consensus and compromise while the relationship is not necessarily an equal one. Take a black employee and his/her white employer for example. Obviously the two roles are not equal. But this unequal mode of connection has room for both parties to cooperate on the basis of equilibrium. In this equilibrium the white employer is superior to the black employee, possibly as a result of their employment relationship, but equally possibly as a result of racism. Scholars have always pointed out that in marriage, both parties have to reach equilibrium through continuous coordination, and find a point of equilibrium unique to the couple through marital negotiations, while the equilibrium itself keeps changing. The equilibrium point may apply to items in marital life which cannot be weighed and reckoned at every turn. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) point out that studies of equality in marital relations should not be focused on division of housework alone. There are a lot of indefinable power relations, for instance, cases of respect for opinions and priorities. In these items which defy objective measurement, mutual adjustment and adaptation are the only means of reaching a stage at which both parties can compromise and feel comfortable, and that is equilibrium.

In contrast to equilibrium, equality is easy to measure. For instance, if one party is responsible for 90 % of housework while the other is responsible for only 10 %, then obviously it is a situation of measurable inequality. In their studies, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) describe four major factors determining husband–wife equality, one of which is that both husband and wife have the right to obtain the other party’s support in order to attain their target. The key point is not target attainment but both parties possessing this right. Discussions about equality often involve equal participation opportunities. Applied to the family, it means women should also have the same

right of participation as men. The result of a decision is not necessarily a combination of opinions from the woman and from the man. What is most important is the opportunity of participation.

In the book, *Love and Marriage of the Chinese at the Turn of the Century*, Xu Anqi (1997) also has a similar discourse. She proposes the concepts of “leading role” and “domination,” which are different from each other. “Domination” implies a hierarchical consciousness, that is to say, one powerful party prevailing over and subduing another party in a dependent relationship. The traditional idea of “husband being the head of the wife” belongs to this mode. “Leading role” refers to both man or wife being able to play a leading role without the consciousness of subordination. All power decisions are based on democracy; both parties generate consensus and decisions through dynamic interaction and can “co-star” in the family drama or “jointly administer” it. This kind of ideal modern family is an important part of the journey to gender equality.

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### Is “The Perfect Man” Found in Shanghai?

Can Shanghai men really live up to the reputation of “the perfect man”? China is a big country with abundant resources, so much so that every nation and region in it has different customs and features. All my interviewees thought that only Shanghai men possess the characteristics of “the perfect man.” The causes may be summed up in terms of the following three factors:

*Geographically: “We are all Southerners.”*

When asked why Shanghai men give outsiders the impression of being frail and henpecked, the first answer of nearly 90 % of the interviewees is “Because we are Southerners.”

Those guys from the Northeast are all very bold and forthright. They are all good soldiers. Now men in Beijing all go out barebacked while Shanghai men cannot do so; we are less assertive and not so bold. (Mr. Wang, 25 years old)

We are not as autocratic as the Northerners, whose traditional male model is a lord who does



not go home until the evening, after eating and drinking all day long. Our traditional male is a “petit bourgeois,” shopping and carrying food together with the wife. Typically the man does the housework and takes care of the kids together with the wife at home. When we talk, we talk softly and gently. (Mr. Long, 56 years old)

The South is the home of books and waters, where generally people are spiritually rich and tolerant. (Mr. Chen, 27 years old)

“Since ancient times, scholars have come from south of the Yangtze River; since ancient times, heroes have come from the North.” This saying may be true. Take the capital, Beijing, for example. Being the home of dynasties throughout history, Beijing is known for the solemnity, doughtiness and boldness of its natives as a result of its historical background; the South is known for the richness of its poetic and artistic conception. This is especially true of Suzhou and Hangzhou, which are next door to Shanghai. The Southern cultural atmosphere permeates Shanghai so much that the people there display personal characteristics as gentle and tolerant as water. In terms of marital relationships, Shanghai men also give outsiders the impression of being frail and henpecked.

*Historical background: “We began to be open to the outside world early and Shanghai has traditionally been an immigrant city.”*

In order to develop the economy and trade, the State began to open the coastal region, Shanghai, to the outside world at an early stage. This opening up has not only promoted the economic development of Shanghai but also enhanced the consciousness and acceptance of new ways of thinking on the part of Shanghai people:

The “petit bourgeois sentiment” of Shanghai is dominant and obviously capitalistic. Capitalism stresses equality, enjoyment and rights. (Mr. Long, 56 years old)

By “petit bourgeois sentiment” Shanghai people mean paying attention to enjoyment and equality. Shanghai people disregard traditional restrictions and are open to new ideas—paying attention to equality and respecting relations between the two sexes. This is particularly meaningful with regard to Shanghai men putting aside their chauvinistic identity and undertaking housework.

On the other hand, with its infinite business opportunities and development potential, Shanghai has long been the dream land of mobile populations. The interviewees indicated that there are very few real natives in Shanghai, that most of the population there come from elsewhere. As a result, Shanghai itself does not have a rigid traditional culture, and neither would people from other areas impose their own tradition on the locals. This situation applies to the family, too. Husbands and wives pay attention to courtesy and respect and will not impose traditional norms on the other party:

I think it is probably because Shanghai is a city of immigration. Shanghai does not have a set of indigenous traditions and norms. Everybody comes from different areas and has to behave courteously to each other and to be receptive to new concepts without imposing their own traditions on others. (Mrs. Chen, 25 years old)

*Coverage by Mass Media: “Attracting attention, Shanghai is naturally extensively covered by the media.”*

The mass media are influential social institution and reports by the media influence people’s consciousness. Take Shanghai men for example. Thanks to the media, their “character” has been widely publicized. Some of the interviewees think that the reason why the media report extensively about Shanghai is because people of all areas are fascinated by everything about Shanghai—from its international status to family trivia. As pointed out by Xu Anqi (1997) in her book, the “perfect man” image of Shanghai males is a creation of reporters:

Maybe because Shanghainese are eye-catching people, the media pay special attention to them, and it has been like that since long ago. No matter what they say, I think this is a good phenomenon. Shanghai is a really attractive place! (Mr. Chen, 27 years old)

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## Are Many Shanghai Men “Perfect Men”?

Under these three headings—geography, historical background, and coverage by the mass media—Shanghai has an advantage in nurturing

the “perfect man.” Doubtless there are Shanghai men who are willing to do housework. However, is this phenomenon universal among Shanghai men? Or are other factors involved?

According to the findings reported earlier, the “perfect man,” as understood by the public, is no longer a feature of Shanghai society today. Nonetheless, we need not be disappointed too early for the “perfect man” has not vanished. He has just been transformed under the reforms and changes of our times.

Based on the data I gathered from the interviewees and research observation, the Shanghai males now may be divided into the younger generation and the older generation. Interviewees between 23 and 30 years old are the younger generation; those between 56 and 66, with children and, in some cases, even grandchildren, are the older generation. Shanghai males of the younger generation no longer do housework while those of the older generation still do. Some of the latter even undertake the housework of their children’s families. What is the cause of this phenomenon? It could be because of the reforms and changes of the times.

Chairman Mao’s impact on China was not limited to national policies; he was also the key figure in women’s liberation. In Chairman Mao’s times, women’s liberation and men and women receiving equal pay for equal work were advocated. Amidst the upsurge in seeking equality, the people’s thoughts were changed by political education and media propaganda which was controlled by the government. At that time, the controlling force exercised by the society was so strong that administrative units of the State not only took charge of people’s daily life and food supply but also interfered with and manipulated marriage and reproduction. Societal control

of the family was carried out through reciprocal monitoring of neighbors. Every family had the duty to monitor families in its neighborhood. Once a neighbor discovered any family violence or disharmony, he or she would report it to the street committee, and the staff concerned would come over to look into and deal with the dispute. This kind of invisible pressure made the people closely follow the orientation and objectives of the State, so that situations of inequality and uncivilized behavior such as physical abuse of wives would not occur.

Another characteristic of Chinese society which led to Shanghai men undertaking housework had to do with state-owned enterprises and the planned economy of that period. A job in a state-owned enterprise was a lifelong one. In those days, the state divided up labor so minutely that the individual’s workload became light. In the planned economy, market competition was low; everything was allocated and arranged by the state; even if you were willing to work hard, it would not lead to better remuneration. As a result, the people did not have to spend too much time and energy on competition, and they were able to devote their leisure time to running their family. This, considered alongside with geography, historical background and media coverage, has produced the world famous “perfect man” of Shanghai:

“Men outside; women inside” does not apply to our generation. You may go to the open market and take a look: most people buying food there are men. It is basically the same with my colleagues, who are responsible for shopping and washing. (Mr. Long, 56 years old)

To me doing housework is a very ordinary thing which cannot all be done by women. This is seen from the point of view of the common people. Those with a career will not undertake much housework. (Mr. Song, 57 years old)



A corner of a food market

However, along with economic development, the planned economy has been gradually replaced by the market economy. People have become profit-led and productivity-oriented in every respect. State-owned enterprises have been replaced by private or foreign capital enterprises so that people's way of life and habits are strongly challenged. Interviewees from both the older and the younger generations indicated that today there are no longer many Shanghai men who do housework. Those still doing housework are mostly husbands of the older generation:

The idea that Shanghai men do housework is a kind of prejudice and misunderstanding. The phenomenon prevailed in the '80s and the '90s. The generation born after the '70s is the newly-wed generation. They are all single children and the younger ones are even more spoiled. They do not actually engage in housework regularly. The definition [of the good Shanghai man] only applies to the older generation. (Mrs. Chen, 25 years old)

I don't think Shanghai men are good at housework. None of my friends are like that. (Mr. Liu, 30 years old)

The interviewees think that changes in working conditions and environment are the main causes of the differences between the two generations. As a consequence of keen competition in the market economy, young interviewees think that devoting their youth and time to their career is the most important contribution they can make—and their greatest obligation—to the family. Since lifelong jobs no longer exist, spending time on housework

is not economically beneficial. Career comes first and family second. That is the aspiration of the younger Shanghai generation. The status of the legendary "perfect man" is the monopoly of Shanghai men of the older generation. This group of senior men will continue to carry forward the virtue of the "perfect man," as shown by the fact that they not only take care of their own family but also undertake the housework of their children's family. Mrs. Chen mentioned above that the younger generation, both men and women, no longer do much housework. Then who does the housework? Well-off families, after weighing the costs and benefits, may choose to hire a domestic helper to do the housework and take care of their kids. Families who are less well-off will turn over their housework and the care of their children to their parents. Three young couples in my research belong to the latter group. During an interview, it suddenly rained and Mrs. Wang immediately telephoned her father, asking him to go to her place and pick up her clothes. Mrs. Wang's father has the key to her place and goes there to do housework practically every day. According to Mrs. Wang, this situation is very common in Shanghai:

The pressure of work now is heavy. It is no longer state-owned enterprises. One does not have much time of one's own. With the rise of capitalism, there are a lot of private firms, and people have to toil with all their might and cannot possibly just work eight hours a day. Naturally they take care of their family less. Basically, men and women of our generation do not want to do housework; children are taken care of by their grandparents; meals are

eaten at the elders' place; housework and cleaning are done by domestic helpers. Many people are like that. (Mrs. Chen, 25 years old)

We are unlike the older generation in that, instead of a timeless job offered by the state, we want to take risks ourselves. In respect of housework, basically both men and women of our generation have slipped back. Women neither knit woolen sweaters nor cook. We are content with whatever is edible and do not cook expertly like our fathers. We don't have time for all that. (Mr. Chen, 27 years old)

My son and daughter-in-law work too hard. So I insist that my husband helps them out. And he takes the kids to the childcare center, brings them back in the afternoon, feeds them and washes them. In the evening, he hands them back to our son. (Mrs. Long, 50 years old)

To Blair and Johnson (1992), willingness on the part of the man to undertake housework like cooking is a good indicator of the degree of equality that exists between the sexes in the family. Perkins and DeMeis (1996) point out that gender equality has to apply on two levels, the public and the private. With the impetus given by the government or social institutions, gender equality on the public level is easier to attain. However, on the private level in the family, men and women are still in a state of inequality.

To sum up, the theory that Shanghai men are willing to take care of the housework no longer has universality. This characteristic only pertains to Shanghai men of the older generation. They not only undertake the housework of their own family but also extend their activities to their children's family. In contrast, Shanghai men of the younger generation have long ceased to have anything to do with housework, and this applies to young Shanghai women, too. If neither men nor women do housework, then the criterion of gender equality in the family has to be amended.

## The "Perfect Man" and Gender Equality

This chapter has asked three basic questions: First, why do Shanghai men possess the characteristic of "the perfect man"? Secondly, is this a universal characteristic of Shanghai men? Thirdly,

what is the significance of this characteristic for gender equality in the Shanghai family?

Since, according to the findings of my research, the younger generation of Shanghai men have already lost the relevant characteristic, only the older generation can become the research subjects for the third question.

As pointed out by Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998), the division of housework is doubtless a strong indicator of the degree of equality that has been achieved in the marital relationship. But, apart from this, there are still many as yet unidentified aspects of power relations that are in need of balance. Shanghai men of the older generation have already passed the test of equality in terms of division of housework. Now their concept of equality will be further tested in terms of power in family decision-making:

(Who decides family matters between you and your spouse? Would there be times when you want to be more male chauvinistic?) Yes, there would be. (Why?) My temper is not very good. Sometimes I am more selfish and want others to comply with my wishes, and I think, "I am a man; you should do this and that ...". When the pressure of work is high, my attitude is: "Don't bother me, just do as I say." (Mr. Hua, 66 years old).

Now his temper is much better. He used to quarrel with our son very often and sometimes even resorted to violence. Oh, terrible! (Mrs. Hua, 63 years old).

The idea that women should respect their husbands influences me very much. In front of outsiders, I know what I would like to say, but it is not appropriate for me to speak out. And so I push him forward. He is a man and that is his role. I am able to make people listen but he is not. I think he should step forward and speak his mind. (Mrs. Lung, 50 years old)

According to the findings of my research, at bottom Shanghai couples of the older generation still believe in the traditional concept of men being superior and women inferior. Mr. Hua undertakes 90 % of the housework, but he also makes 90 % of the decisions in the family. Gender roles in the family are still clearly defined by the division of labor between the two sexes. Family members are only granted the right to discuss issues with him when he is in a good mood. At other times, he may even resort to violence. This is precisely why Xu Anqi (1997)

points out that the prevailing practice in the family contradicts the notion that gender equality has been achieved.

Shanghai men of the younger generation hold a more open-minded view regarding the division of power in family decision-making, and both husband and wife have equal opportunities of participation. They think that equality means respect for every family member and that violence is unacceptable. Their pursuit of gender equality influences their friends and families horizontally, while their family education assures a kind of vertical continuity for the next generation:

All family matters are jointly determined. Sometimes I listen to her; sometimes she listens to me. Never is anything decided by one person alone. (Mr. Wang, 25 years old)

The husband, the wife and the kid all value democracy, and every matter is decided through consultation instead of by any single party. Even the opinion of the kid is important. I also treat my friends and neighbors like that. We never beat up our wives; we have similar ideas about family and democracy. If the family of some friend of mine isn't like this, I would try to persuade them. But when I treat neighboring kids to a meal, I would respect democratic principles and refrain from favoritism. In this way, the kids will take the message home and their own attitudes will be influenced to some extent. (Mr. Liu, 30 years old)

There needs to be a fundamental re-appraisal of the view that "the willingness of men to undertake housework exemplifies the arrival of gender equality in the family as well as in the private areas of people's lives." Shanghai men of the older generation do housework but they exercise authority when it comes to decision-making power in the family. Shanghai men of the younger generation do not do housework but they place a premium on equal opportunities for husband and wife to take part in family decisions. I myself think that equal division of housework is gradually dying out in the marital life of the younger generation. Participation in housework is no longer an indicator of gender equality in the family.

However, I do not deny the importance of division of housework in fostering gender equality in families of the younger generation. It is crucial to gender equality in the family. It is just that along with the commercialization of housework, this

element is gradually becoming less significant. Once this factor needs to be reintegrated into the life of the couple (for instance, in the absence of the older generation's care or of economic capability), the conflict, contradiction and injustice, which have so far remained dormant, will reappear. Scholars in both the West and the East, such as DeMaris and Longmore (1996), Blair and Johnson (1992), Xu Anqi and Ye Wenzhen (1999) insist that a very significant degree of gender equality is manifested when the man is willing to do housework, especially housework of an unpleasant nature. Only when the couple maintains balance in both housework division *and* family decision-making can the family move towards real gender equality.

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## Conclusion

Shanghai is leading the development of the economy and civilization in China. The popularized version of the Shanghai man is a perfect twenty-first century man who is gentle, caring and knowledgeable, and who is functional in both the kitchen and the office. This is a big encouragement to scholars in family gender equality, for these men are breaking out of the traditional family roles, bringing the consciousness of gender equality from the public sphere of society to the private sphere of family.

According to the findings of my research, the title of "the most perfect man in the world" does not apply to Shanghai men universally. Shanghai men are splitting up into two major categories: The first kind is "the perfect man" good at doing housework as is popularly rumored. It mainly consists of men of the older generation. The second kind is Shanghai men of the younger generation who completely give up housework but pursue democracy and equality. The age of 50 may be taken as the watershed between these two kinds of men in the interviews. The age difference between these two categories of interviewees is 20–30 years, and they represent two generations. The cause of the differences between these two generations of men is closely connected with the economic development of China.



Working in state-owned enterprises under a planned economy where market competition was low, men of the older generation naturally had more time to spend on housework. Working in a competitive environment under the market economy, which places a premium on cost effectiveness, the younger generation of men will not invest time in housework; likewise the women.

According to Xu Anqi (1997), Xu Anqi and Ye Wenzehn (1999), Shanghai men do not outshine Nanjing, Chengdu or Beijing men in terms of participation in housework. This contradicts the popular image of the “good Shanghai man.” This chapter proposes that the notion of Shanghai men doing housework be put in the perspective of economic and cultural differences between the two generations in order to account for the contradiction between the popular image and the studies of Xu and Ye. In fact, just because the idea of Shanghai men doing housework is popularly accepted does not mean that all Shanghai men will do housework. Targeted at the entire Shanghai society, the studies of Xu and Ye are supported by concrete data, which conclude that the percentage of Shanghai men undertaking housework is lower than in other regions of China.

Another focus of mine is the redefinition of the significance of housework division to the studies of gender equality in the family. Along with social transformation based on cost effectiveness and with the rise in the commercialization of housework, housework division is gradually disappearing from marital life. Participation is neither measurable nor representative, let alone reflective of gender equality in the family. The theory that “housework division is not a suitable indicator for measuring gender equality in the family” is not only applicable to Shanghai but also has relevance, in terms of cost effectiveness, to other modernized cities.

In order to attain gender equality in the family, I think that it is necessary to balance the importance of housework division and power in family decision-making, apart from supplementing the emphasis laid by other scholars on the division of household tasks of different kinds between the

two sexes. In order for their city to acquire pioneering status, lead economic development and at the same time promote gender equality, Shanghai men and women have to re-examine and further develop the concepts of the division of housework and shared powers of family decision-making. This is in addition to horizontally influencing friends and their families through raising their consciousness of gender equality, and vertically educating the next generation.

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## Economic Transition and the Potential Risks of Marital Instability in Contemporary Urban China

32

Yan Yu

China is experiencing a fundamental social, political, economic, and cultural transformation under the impact of the present capitalistic globalization phenomena. The country's planning economy has partially been replaced by a more free-market economy. Many state-owned factories or businesses are in a depressed state and even close to bankruptcy. They are facing downsizing and restructuring so that they can survive in this economic transition. Millions of workers were laid off in the past decade, and 59 % of them were female, even though women made up only 39 % of workers in total (Xu and Ye 1999). In the meantime, more and more private enterprises have emerged and quickly developed. The job market has become more competitive. It is apparent that the "iron-rice-bowl" job security has been broken and there is no lifetime job employment any more. The state-controlled employment system is weakened and gradually replaced by a new employment policy, encouraging competition in the job market (Pan 2002).

Along with the reform in the employment system, other reforms such as education, housing, and health insurance are taking place in China too. The state-imposed free compulsory education, free housing, and free medical services have all been reformed. Individuals are partially, if not

completely, responsible for paying for education, housing, and medical services. These reforms, without doubt, have greatly increased the financial burdens of individuals and their families. Although the economy is growing fast in China, it is not easy to find a decent paid job let alone cover various expenses. Clearly, both men and women are enduring an unprecedented pressure at work and at home. What do these economic changes mean to their marriage experience?

Culturally, the state-enforced gender equality ideal is being replaced by a more capitalistic ideology of "survival of the fittest." "Equal pay for equal work" has begun to crumble as the party-state has ceased to be the central institute for labor allocation during the recent market reform. China used to be one of the countries around the world that had the least gender differences in income gap and labor force participation rates. Now this has all changed. Without the party-state protection Chinese women are more likely to be unemployed than men, and if employed they are more likely to earn less than men during the market reform (Pan 2002; Tang and Parish 2000). Consequently some women began to seek to restore "feminine" identity in the domestic sphere (Xu 1998; Zuo and Bian 2001). Some social scientists in the late 1980s even proposed to send women back home to alleviate the unemployment problem (Wang 1998). The past marital balance created by national labor allocation and "equal pay for equal work" has been lost, or at least tipped in this economic transition. What does this cultural change mean to married couples in

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China? Does it mean that they will have a more stable marriage as they go back to the traditional family model of “Men dominate the outside; women dominate the inside”?

To fully understand the state of marriage in urban China in the context of economic change, I intend to find out what current social transformations, particularly economic (i.e., from planning economy to free-market economy) and cultural (i.e., from an egalitarian gender role ideology to a more traditional gender role ideology) transformations, mean to the stability of marital relationships, and what new challenges urban couples are facing in the economic transitional era of China.

## **Economic Changes, Gender Relations, and Marital Stability in Urban China**

### **The Pre-Reform Period (1949–1977)**

In order to strengthen its power and security, the Communist China copied the Soviet Union and gave priority to the development of the heavy industries in the 1950s (Pan 2002). Since China was in the state of “poverty and blankness” at that time, the government had to use its central administrative power to control the price and floating direction of its materials and labor to obtain cheap ones. To control the influence of the law of the market, the government implemented a planned allocation of its materials and labor, particularly in heavy industries.

Developing heavy industries required launching large-scale production. Almost all the men were recruited to participate in the production, and since the labor was so cheap, women were encouraged to participate in the socialist economic development. Under such circumstances, the dramatic increase of the female labor force participation occurred in the 1950s in China. In the meantime, to ensure a massive employment the government managed to keep all the wages low. As a result, the income gap among workers as well as between men and women was not big accordingly. Women’s continuous employment (i.e., continued to work after marriage) and their relative equal pay with men established a balanced relationship in marriage

(Xu 1998). According to Xu, there are several benefits for women and their marriages if married women continue to work for pay. She argues that women’s continuous employment weakens gender segregation in occupation and reduces the income gap of gender. Women’s continuous employment also weakens the traditional family model of “male breadwinner and female homemaker.” Consequently, the traditional gender role ideology of “Men dominate the outside; Women dominate the inside” can be weakened when women continue to work for pay after marriage. Women’s employment will push their husbands to be involved in childcare and household chores, and enhance marital balance between wives and husbands. It is apparent that the high percentage of women’s paid labor force participation, their continuous employment pattern, small pay gap between men and women, and the establishment of national marriage laws to emphasize marital freedom, monogamy, and gender equality, contributed to the increasing power of Chinese women in society as well as in marriage.

In a study of 800 families in Shanghai, Gansu, Guangzhou, and Harbin, Xu and Ye (1999) found that perceived equal status of husband and wife was a major predictor of satisfaction of marital relationship in Chinese families. The decline of marital satisfaction with age may indicate increased differences on social and financial status between husband and wife in the family as the husband gradually acquires relatively higher achievement in his career. As a result of the development of a market economy and the introduction of Western values to China, some salient phenomena concerning marital relationship have appeared in recent years.

### **The Market Reform Period (1978–Present)**

The post-Mao market reform, which took place inevitably, has turned the Chinese socialist economy upside down. It has substantially weakened the state control over marriage and family life. The state’s initiatives on privatization, decentralization, and open-door policy have

led to the emergence of the private sector (Zuo 2005; 2003). The “iron-rice-bowl” job security in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is not ensured by the state, and is replaced by a contract system, which gives individuals great incentives for job mobility. Getting a job in the private sector means higher earnings but with a possible loss of benefits normally available for state employees, such as housing, health care, pensions, and so forth. This means that individuals themselves are responsible for paying for housing, medical services, and retirement security. In the meantime, working in the private sector means more demanding and challenging work, higher pressure, and less family time.

In China’s shift to a market economy, many new jobs have been created for men and women, but the decline of the vast majority of state enterprises, and excessive labor supply make it difficult for many to find or retain a job. This is especially true for older, ill-educated, unskilled, and female workers. The poor performance of state enterprises poses an especially serious problem in that it not only fails to continually provide the same benefits to workers as they did before but also launches massive layoffs (Pan 2002; Zuo 2003). Among all workers who were laid off in 1997, women constituted 59 % (Xu and Ye 1999). In other words, 10.9 % of women lost their jobs. In contrast, only 4.5 % of men were laid off in that year (Chen and He 2005). Chinese women are undertaking an unprecedented pressure. They are bearing pressure from workplace, and in the meantime they are still shouldering heavy family responsibilities. After narrowing in the pre-market reform period, the gender pay gap is widening a little in the market reform when the state-imposed “Equal pay for equal work” policy is drastically weakened. This widening gender pay gap may upset an existing marital balance achieved after 1949 (Xu 1998). In 1983 one member of National Political Consultative Conference even proposed that married female workers should quit their job and go back home taking care of their family. The supporters believed women going back home could reduce the domestic burdens of dual-earner families, and at the same time could secure male workers’ employment.

Under these circumstances, how many women would want to go back home and become a homemaker? Xu (1998) found that women under 30 were more willing to stay at home than previous generations, but added that their aversion to working stemmed in part from repeatedly encountering discrimination. A recent online survey, conducted by Hua Kun Women Survey Center, found that 77 % of women disagreed to send women back home. Eighty-seven percent of women did not want to give up their job and return home if they had a job. When asked why they disagreed to send women back home, 49 % of them believed that a modern woman should not be just recognized by her family. She should be recognized by society too. If a woman stays at home taking care of her child and husband, she will be recognized mostly at home but not in society. About 30 % of the women in the survey thought returning home will make women lose their economic position, and their status at home will not be guaranteed either. Twenty-seven percent were worried to lose their career development if they returned home. The survey results indicate that more and more Chinese women are aware of the impact of their economic independence on their status at home, and they have been working hard to achieve an equal relationship with their spouse.

However, the meanings of work and family are gendered (Zuo and Bian 2001) among Chinese married couples. When asked whether they would want to return home once their husbands’ incomes were sufficient to support the family, the majority of working wives in a qualitative study of 39 couples in urban China said no (Zuo 2003). To them, paid employment meant social status, social participation, self-fulfillment and enjoyment. Although women did not specifically relate their meaning of market work to marital stability, men in the same study believed their wives’ job compatibility would facilitate marital communication and enhance marital happiness. A few middle-class men even expressed their regret over the fact that their wives did not have a job or were not career-oriented. They perceived a compatible marital relationship as one with both spouses working on an equal setting. Men’s perception of

women's employment, however, is much gendered because men had no expectation of their wives' being committed breadwinners. What men expected of their wives was to combine their career with household responsibilities (Zuo 2003). As long as wives take good care of the family they can do whatever they want. Whereas men's market work is perceived as directly associated with the financial well-being of the family, women's is not (Hood 1983; Zuo 2003). Because of the gendered meanings of work and family marital resources are gendered too (Zuo and Bian 2001). Men make money as their marital resources whereas women do the majority of housework and childcare for the exchange perceived as "equal" within their gender. Even for those wives who out-earn their husbands, they still do not perceive the unequal division of domestic labor as an unfair arrangement. This is because dominant gender ideologies that devalue women's work may condition the negotiations over the value of women's employment (Fuwa 2004). So the so-called equal marital relationship in contemporary China is in fact very much gendered, or unequal. Could this self-perceived equality but actually inequality become a potential risk of marital instability in the economic transition in China? Although men are found to associate their spouse job compatibility with their marital stability (Zuo 2003), we are not clear how men interpret this association. Is it really because men see marital inequality as a threat to marital stability, or is it something else? The present study intends to explore this issue further and go deeply into how men interpret their support for their wives' work.

Yang and Neal (2006) find that life after marriage is largely peaceful and stable among those middle-aged women who were socialized and educated with collectivist value systems; who lived through the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976 and went to the countryside as secondary school students to "receive re-education" from peasants. They find that with a few exceptions, the women interviewed mostly experienced an egalitarian relationship in the marriage, with combined incomes, shared chores, and family decision-making. For those who expressed being unhappy with their husbands, their dissatisfaction

stemmed from their husbands being distracted with their own social activities and from the rise of material prosperity, which triggered increased marital infidelity. Would the rise of material prosperity and the increased marital infidelity force women to re-evaluate the meaning of their paid employment? How do women perceive the impact of their work role on marital stability?

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### **Economic Changes and Marital Stability in the U.S.: Theoretical Arguments**

The United States emerged from World War II ready to move into a leadership position in the world economy. Suffering little damage to its industrial base during the war, and plus the destruction in other nations created a huge market for the goods that Americans could produce, the United States was able to experience an enormous boom in the economy in the 1950s and 1960s. For the first time in more than 100 years, people married at a younger age, bore their children earlier, and experienced a longer period of living together as a couple after their children left home (Coontz 1992). The American family historian Stephanie Coontz (1992) describes the 1950s family as "a nostalgia trap," "a historical fluke" based on a unique and temporary conjuncture of economic, social, and political factors, while some American sociologists idealize the 1950s family. Talcott Parsons (1955) was a key figure in the development of the sociology of family. He believed that society is best served by families that are functional units in which one male person serves the "instrumental" needs of the family members. By this he meant that men should be the rational, decision-making, money-earning public figures. Parsons thought that the ideal complement to the instrumental husband was an "expressive" wife, a woman who would be the nurturant, domestic, provider of childcare. Within this framework, a woman employed outside the home was believed to be disruptive or dysfunctional for her family. In 1955, Parsons wrote,

It seems quite safe in general to say that the adult feminine role has not ceased to be anchored



primarily in the internal affairs of the family, as wife, mother and manager of the household, while the role of the adult male is primarily anchored in the occupational world, in his job and through it by his status-giving and income-earning functions for the family (pp. 14–15).

Clearly, wives' employment negatively affects marriage by threatening spouses' role complementarity (Parsons and Bales 1955). This functionalist perspective emphasizes the necessity of the traditional division of labor for ensuring marital quality and stability.

More recently, Becker (1981), too, is arguing that households work in the most rational and efficient manner as a team seeking to divide housework and market work along the gender line because that is the most efficient means. Based on this rational choice theory, Becker argues that wives' income reduces spouses' gains from the efficiency inherent in the traditional division of labor. Similarly, Furstenberg and Cherlin (1992) argue that divorce has become more common in recent decades because spouses have less to exchange within marriage. Traditional marital arrangements and wives' increasing income may lead to conflict, given that wives with more income expect more equity in decision making (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983). Greenstein (1996) finds that this is especially true among women with more liberal attitudes about gender roles. Because wives may view requests for change as overdue but husbands may view them as challenges to their privilege, husbands may be especially likely to report negative effects of wives' employment on marital quality (Rogers 1999).

A contrasting body of thought argues that declines in role complementarity and increases in equity have positive consequences for marriage (Hood 1983; Scanzoni 1972, 1978). Scanzoni (1972) argues that equitable economic contributions are requisite for satisfying marital relationships. Hood (1983) found that wives' employment and income were associated with more equal sharing of childcare, more shared interests, and spouses' greater interest in each other as individuals and confidantes. All these factors contributed to greater marital satisfaction among the people in her research. Similar findings by

Hochschild and Machung (1989) and Gerson (1993) indicate that spouses report happier marriages when marital and work roles are shared equitably. In her more recent work, Hochschild (2003) calls for a warm modern model of care in response to a care deficit in both public and private lives. As the United States has grown relatively richer in the global economy, the class gap within this "core" of capitalism has widened, and "the care of many dependents seems to have eroded, too" (p. 215). The flight of capital to cheap labor pools in the developing world, the disappearance of well-paid industrial jobs and the rise of poorly paid service jobs, the weakening of labor unions, and the influx of migrant workers put a squeeze on average blue-collar workers. In addition, the economic recession of the 1980s and cost cutting due to global competition in the 1990s have led to stagnation in the middle class and decline among the poor. As a social-class divide has deepened, change has occurred in the structure of family and work. High divorce rates lead to the rise of the single-parent family, where both single mothers and fathers face a care deficit. In the two-parent family, spouses face a tension point in marriage if they are not able to balance their work and family responsibilities. The warm modern model of care calls for fulfilling the needs through sharing between the public and private, and between women and men. In other words, egalitarianism is the ultimate factor of maintaining both marital and social stability.

Building on previous studies of economic changes and marriage experiences in both urban China and the United States (Tang and Parish 2000; Yang and Neal 2006; Xu 1998; Zuo 2003; Zuo and Bian 2001), this chapter examines the subjectivities and experiences of Chinese married couples as they live in a context of new opportunities, crises, and challenges. What is it like to live as a couple in a society undertaking such dramatic economic and cultural changes? What are the potential risks of marital instability in the economic transition? Would the male breadwinner and female homemaker model be ideal to maintain the stability of marriage in urban China?

## Interviews with Chinese Married Couples

The current study is based on 44 interviews of 23 married couples, which I conducted in Beijing, China, in the summer 2004. Two husbands were too busy to schedule an appointment with me, but they did fill out their demographic questionnaires. I chose the city of Beijing as my project site because as the capital of China, Beijing has been most responsive to the influences of political ideologies and state policies and was top in the nation in programs of gender equalization in education and employment in the Mao era (Zhou et al. 1996).

I employed a snowball sampling technique through word-of-mouth referrals of friends and acquaintances. This method has been used by family sociologists due to its strength in providing the richness of their data (Becker and Moen 1999; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Zuo and Bian 2001). I asked my friends and acquaintances from different socioeconomic backgrounds to reach out to their relatives or friends who met my sampling criterion, married with or without children. After I interviewed them I asked them if they knew anyone who would be interested in talking to me about marriage and family. Several interviewees told me that they agreed to be interviewed because of their friends. Otherwise, they would not like to talk to a stranger about their marriages and families. After each interview I asked them to fill out a questionnaire, which includes individual demographic background, responsibilities of childcare, the division of housework and childcare, gender role attitudes, and marital quality and marital satisfaction.

The interviews were conducted in Putonghua but later were transcribed in English. All the interviews were conducted separately for husbands and wives. Interview locations were chosen for interviewees' convenience: most were in their homes or offices, but a few were in public places such as restaurants. A typical interview lasted about one hour. Some interviews lasted more than two hours. Generally wives' interviews lasted longer than husbands' interviews. When permitted by the interviewee, a tape recorder was used.

## The 23 Beijing Couples: A Description

The married couples I interviewed are a heterogeneous group, covering a wide spectrum of demographic, social, and economic characteristics of families in Beijing. As indicated in Table 32.1, the wives' ages ranged from 26 to 56 (average of 40.9) while the husbands' from 31 to 57 (average of 42.1). Most couples had one child, six couples remained childless, and two couples were pregnant with their first child. The age of the youngest child among the couples with children ranged from three to 27 years old. Nearly all levels of education were found in each gender. Annual family earnings ranged from a low of 47,976 yuan to a high of 132,000 yuan. Of the 23 couples, 18 were dual-earner couples, and five were single-earner couples. Three wives stayed at home full time with no income, and two husbands were retired. Informants had various occupations in both public and private sectors.

Table 32.2 shows that marriages of these 23 couples were stable. Of all the couples interviewed, only one husband admitted openly that he wanted to divorce his wife. He still stayed in this unhappy marriage because his wife threatened to kill herself if he filed a divorce. The overall marital satisfaction was 7.72 on a scale of 0–10, with 0 indicating the lowest and 10 the highest (9.04 for husbands and 8.7 for wives). The overall satisfaction with housework division was 8.58 (8.48 for husbands and 8.68 for wives) while the overall satisfaction with childcare arrangement was 7.72 (7.89 for husbands and 7.56 for wives), both directing toward the higher end of the scale. The overall work and family conflict level was reported low (an average of 3.78), although wives reported a higher level of work and family conflict (an average of 4.26) than did husbands (an average of 3.27).

Although most couples showed no sign of divorce in their marriage and reported a fairly high level of marital satisfaction and a low level of work and family conflict, I found in my interviews that they were not free from strains and potential risks. This is not surprising. When significant changes take place in the economic and political systems, dramatic changes occur in

**Table 32.1** Demographic and economic characteristics of the sample ( $N=23$  couples)

Couple	Percentage	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Length of marriage (years)		14.6	0.6	31
Married with/without children (%)				
Two children	4.3			
One child	65			
Pregnant	8.7			
Childless	26.1			
Age of children (years)		15	1	29
Couple income (yuan)		101,720	47,976	227,988
Wife's relative income (%)		43.1	0	100
Individuals	Husband (min, max)			Wife (min, max)
Mean age (years)	42.1 (31, 57)			40.9 (26, 56)
Education (%)				
Junior high	8.7			4.3
Senior high	8.7			17.4
Two-year college	30.4			34.8
College	43.5			30.4
MA/MS	4.3			8.7
PhD	4.3			4.3
Employment status (%)				
Employed	87			83
Unemployed	9			13
Self-employed	4			4
Mean income (yuan)	56,716 (23,988, 132,000)			51,991 (0, 132,000)
Mean weekly work hours	41.4 (0, 60)			39.0 (0, 70)
Occupation (%)				
Professions/technicians	21.7			56.5
Government officials	4.3			0
Managers	34.8			8.7
Business persons	4.3			0
Office workers	13			8.7
Factory/service workers	8.7			13

other parts of society as well, such as marriages and families. New challenges, new concerns, and new opportunities emerge. Historically, the way in which changes in the economy such as the development of industrialization or the transition from socialism to capitalism had significant effects on the family lives of the people living during those transitions.

In-depth interviews allow me to go beyond the numbers and go deeply into how those couples feel about their marital relationships and what concerns they have had since the economic transition started in China. Most couples told me that they felt their marriages were more vulnerable in

the market reform period than in the pre-reform period, and now they had more challenges to face in their marriage. In the pre-reform period, married couples did not need to worry too much about whether they would be laid off the next day, or whether they would have money to cover their child's education, or whether they could afford to buy a big house or a car. In the past, before the economic transition, husbands and wives shared family responsibilities and both worked for equal pay promoted by the Chinese government. Now the economic system has switched, if not completely to the market economy and it has developed very fast. Accordingly,

**Table 32.2** Selected marriage characteristics of the sample ( $N=23$  couples)

Sample	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Marital satisfaction	8.87	5	10
Satisfaction with housework	8.58	5	10
Satisfaction with childcare	7.72	5	10
Work/family conflict	3.78	1	10
Individuals	Husband (min, max)	Wife (min, max)	
Marital satisfaction	9.04 (5, 10)	8.7 (1, 10)	
Satisfaction with housework	8.48 (5, 10)	8.68 (5, 10)	
Satisfaction with childcare	7.89 (5, 10)	7.56 (5, 9)	
Work/family conflict	3.27 (1, 9)	4.26 (1, 10)	

marital relations start changing too, and bearing more strains associated with the economic transition. So, what are the potential risks of marital instability among Chinese couples?

### Potential Risks of Marital Instability

Although most married couples said they were happy with their marriage, they admitted that the economic transition in China made their marriage more vulnerable than ever before. It takes more money, time, and energy than ever for the couples to maintain a harmonious relationship in marriage in this economic transformation. Many couples feel exhausted by working overtime for money, keeping up with the Joneses, and constantly worrying about the increasing costs of childcare and education, and their spouses' unhealthy lifestyle, which has led to their poor health conditions.

### Excessive Work Pressure and Time

Due to the competitive nature of the market economy, work life has become more fast-paced, and more competitive, especially in the private-owned companies. Many couples in their mid and late 50s used to work in the state-owned factories or work units, and they found it hard to adapt to the fast-paced, competitive work environment under the market economic system. A lot of them would rather take early retirement than work in the private sector. Younger couples, particularly husbands, felt

that they were still young and had time and energy to challenge the new work environment. They did not mind working around the clock diligently as long as they made money. One husband in his early 40s shared his experience with me. He used to work in a state-owned factory and later left that job for a higher paid job in a private business. His wife still kept her state-owned job for its benefits and security. The husband told me that in the past he would have called his wife if he was not able to come home for dinner, but now he would call his wife if he were able to go home for dinner. This is because not coming home for dinner has become a daily routine for him, and his wife is so used to this fact. He said,

I remember I had a very serious talk with my wife before I decided to leave a state-run steel factory. I told her it was very comfortable working in this kind of workplace (the state-owned factory). Things were regular from 8:00 to 5:00, and no pressure. If I worked for a private business, things would be different. I would work harder and have less time at home, but my income would be higher. I told her I would spend less time with her and our child, but that was the division of labor between us, and I wanted to use this opportunity to make more money. In the market economy, money is very powerful. We can't survive without money.

Then he continued, "There are no absolutely stable jobs nowadays. It's all relatively stable. In such a fast changing society, if you don't know how to adjust to changes you will be out right away." So apparently this economic transition means longer working hours, more demanding work, less job security, and less family time for most young and middle-aged husbands, and some wives too.

Many working couples, especially the ones with young children, complain about inadequate family time together. Wives complain about their husbands unable to spend time with them and their child, and husbands complain about their work overload and intense competition, which hinders them from spending time with their family. Some husbands in the study told me that they were so busy that sometimes they had to stay up in the office for a couple of days. Some wives understood their husbands' situations in the circumstance where rewards (i.e., income) outweighed costs (i.e., loss of family time). Complaints, arguments, and quarrels, however, would emerge when husbands' earnings did not increase but their time spent at work or with friends increased. In other words, many wives were concerned that their husbands spent too much time at work but were not paid off with big paychecks. Evidently, wives' complaints reflect their gender expectation for their husbands and at the same time reinforce the traditional gender role for husbands as a major breadwinner in the family. As Zuo (2003) states, wives and husbands are gendered partners in marriage where there are far more husbands than wives entering the private sector to seek higher earnings, and where the husbands are more likely to have demanding jobs with low job security, and work extra time than the wives, who instead are more likely to hold jobs with high job security, and take over household responsibilities. This type of arrangement fits so well in the gender boundary that both spouses are expected to be happy with the arrangement. However, this gendered arrangement works out fine only when husbands' excessive work time is paid off with big money. Wives expressed discontent when their husbands worked excessively but were not able to bring home big money, and when they were not able to spend adequate time with the family. The high level of wives' discontent is driven by the rise of materialism in the economic transition of urban China.

### The Rise of Materialism

Both husbands and wives in the present study expressed their disagreement against the current

growing social mentality, that is, the "keeping up with the Joneses." They believed this kind of mentality driven by the rapid uprising consumerism and materialism would increase people's desire and make them discontent with what they already have, which eventually would disrupt the harmony at home. A father of a five-year-old girl said,

I think money is the main factor that really affects marriages and families. Money can satisfy people's desires. If you don't have enough money, your desires will not be satisfied. If your desires are not satisfied, you won't have a balanced mentality, which will negatively affect many aspects of your life.

Some husbands believed their wives were driven by this popular social mentality to constantly push their husbands to find a well-paid job and make more money. Husbands themselves did not want their wives to feel they were incapable of making money, and plus they themselves strongly believed that was their responsibility as the main provider of the family. Evidently, the rise of materialism associated with economic transition does not weaken the gendered division of domestic labor; on the contrary, it reinforces gender expectations for each spouse to the extent that the marital harmony can be disrupted when one spouse does not fulfill the expectations of his/her spouse. As Thompson (1993) states, people negotiate gender with one another through everyday interaction. "Interaction is an occasion for evoking gender expectations from the partner and confirming—or disconfirming—gender definitions of self (p. 564)." In this case, wives expect their husbands to make more money so that they can afford to purchase a car or a bigger house. They then convey their gender expectations for the other using words or action. For example, the wife constantly complains how crowded their apartment is and all the furniture is out of date, and how inconvenient and exhausting it is for her to take bus to send the child to school every day. Wives sometimes casually mention their friends' family vacations in South Asia or Europe. At this point, the husband interprets the situation and the wife's words and perhaps concludes that this is an occasion that is relevant to his gendered definition of self. This interactional situation provides the husband with



an opportunity to “do” gender, to display himself as a man. The marital harmony is maintained as long as both spouses fulfill their gender roles successfully (Zuo and Bian 2001), particularly the husband being able to bring home big money. Otherwise, marital conflicts and dissatisfaction are visible in a marriage where the husband is laid off, or the wife out-earns her husband.

### **The Increasing Costs of Childcare and Education**

Physical child caring activities are not a challenge for many couples. What so challenging for parents nowadays are the rising costs of education for children. According to Xu (2004), the estimate cost of children aged 0–16 is 25,000 yuan, aged 0 to high school graduation is 48,000 yuan, and aged 0–30 years old (unmarried) is 49,000 yuan. About 25 % of families’ expenses on children exceed half of a couple’s income (Xu 2004). She finds that before children reach school age, the expenses on day care, activities, private tutors, and stationary are less than those on food and nutrition, whereas after children reach school age, those expenses exceed food and nutrition costs. It would cost more in total if parents send their children to a boarding school due to the fact that they are too busy to take care of them. Many couples in the 50s felt so lucky that they had finished raising their children and supporting their children’s education. Those couples who just launched a family were the ones who worried most about their financial situations.

The dramatic increase in the costs of living, especially the costs of raising a child from 0 to 30 years old, has generated a high level of strain in marriage. In the present study, several couples with young children indicated that just thinking about the costs of their child’s education gave them headaches. A young mother of a five-year-old girl told me, whenever she thought about the amount of money she and her husband needed to save up for their daughter’s elementary school admission, her head was “getting bigger.” Her frustration made her even wonder why she married her husband in the first place. She said,

“Sometimes I don’t understand why I chose him as my husband. What’s so special about him? Really when I look back, he didn’t have anything back then before we were married.” Along with the rise of materialism, the increasing financial burdens of childrearing and child education have raised the wife’s requirements of her husband’s accomplishments in social status and wealth, and again reinforced the husband’s traditional gender role at home, that is, providing financial support for the family. When asked how they could improve their marriages, several husbands answered that they wanted to make more money so that their marriages would be more stable. Many wives expressed the same feeling but they did not expect themselves to make more money. Instead, they expected their husbands to play that role. This in fact has caused a great strain in marriage, where the wife expresses discontent with her husband, and the husband feels pressure to produce more income.

### **The Unhealthy Lifestyle and Vulnerable Health Condition**

The economic transition has changed the nature of work and improved people’s standard of living. Individuals have more work-related or social eating and drinking engagements than before. Extravagant eating and drinking have caused many wives in the study to worry about their husbands’ health. They tried very hard to change their husbands’ unhealthy lifestyles, like too much meat consuming, excessive alcohol drinking, and addicted smoking. Some husbands would listen to their wives but some would feel that they were controlled by their wives, and had no degree of freedom in marriage. Men feel that wives’ complaints directly interfere with the pursuit of their own pleasure, and thus the freedom of men in a marriage is greatly diminished. Wives in the present study believe, however, that their husbands’ health does not belong to themselves any more after marriage. Their health would affect how well the family functions as a whole. Some husbands dislike their wives’ constant naggings and create passive aggressive behavior. A working

wife, whose husband just took an early retirement a few months ago, said,

It's good for his health if he quits smoking and drinking, but my husband interprets my concern differently. He thought that I tried to find a way to limit his freedom and to find some excuse and evoke a quarrel with him.

The wife told me that recently her husband started to pay attention to his diet because he was diagnosed with diabetes and high blood pressure. Several wives had tears in their eyes when they talked about their husbands' health conditions. They told me they just wished they were all in good health when they entered their retirement and were free to travel together. It is clear health has become a potential risk of marital instability for married couples, particularly those in the 40s and 50s. Again, gender differentials in behavior still exist. There were far more wives than husbands attempting to change their spouses' unhealthy lifestyles to improve their health. More husbands than wives felt constrained by their spouses' constant complaints.

Apparently, institutional changes in the economy and labor market are important in shaping similar but also different marital experiences among the husbands and wives. My research results indicate that for urban married couples pressure existed both at work and at home. The couples were exhausted with unprecedented pressure at work and constant concerns and worries. Would this unprecedented pressure of the couples send the wives back home as a solution to maintain a stable marriage? What does this western family model mean to both Chinese husbands and wives in this economic transitional era?

### **The Male Breadwinner–Female Homemaker Model: Not an Ideal but a Potential Threat**

Talcott Parsons (1955) believed that family stability was assumed to be critical to childhood outcomes, and marital satisfaction was central to that stability. He proposed that the male breadwinner–female homemaker model was the one that enabled to maintain marital harmony and

family stability. Working mothers, as a result, were found to be destabilizing and therefore a threat to maintaining an equilibrium at home. What does this ideal family model once strongly promoted in the 1950s in the United States mean to the wives and husbands in contemporary urban China? How did the wives and husbands in the present study see the impact of this traditional family model on their marital stability?

When both the wives and husbands in the study were asked whether or not they would like to follow this ideal family model, a common response I received is “No way!” They strongly believed having a male breadwinner and a female homemaker would de-stabilize rather than stabilize their marriage. Some of them even expressed their sympathy for those who lived in this traditional model, and predicted that their marriage would not last long. Many wives and their husbands as well viewed this newly emergent ideology of restoring femininity a potential threat to their marital harmony, particularly in this economic transitional era. A female respondent, a psychologist in the study, commented as follows:

I don't think a marriage will be stable if the wife doesn't work. It will be meaningless to live if a woman doesn't have a career or job. Imagine how your husband would think about you as a professional housewife who doesn't have any interest in the outside world and only does housework and childcare at home?

A TV program editor, mother of a three-year-old boy, also emphasized the wife's work role in marital communication. She said,

I wouldn't feel good if I stayed at home full time taking care of my child and everything else. I don't want to feel disconnected with society or outside the world. In that way, I wouldn't be able to understand the society where my husband was working. As a result, the couple would live in two different worlds. The wife needs to get into the husband's world and then she can understand how he thinks and what kind of problems he may have in the real world. The couple need to walk through their life course together. If the wife gives up everything I don't think this will do any good for her family. It's hard for the wife to share and understand her husband's happiness and hardships. If both spouses work, they can share their working experience with each other. In that way, they know why he or she is happy or not happy. This is communication. Also,

I think without economic independence she won't have an independent human dignity. I don't feel comfortable spending other people's money.

For most wives in the present study, being employed would facilitate marital communication and enhance marital happiness.

As a better economy increases individuals' desire for better living conditions, it increases women's expectations of a man's emotional commitment and accomplishments in self-cultivation, social status, and wealth as the society we live in is still gendered. A very successful manager at a major insurance company, mother of a 10-year-old girl, believed that husbands being incompetent forced their wives to work and do well outside the home. She said, "Who wants to go out and work if her husband is able to afford to have her stay at home?" She believed she was so successful in her career because she had "a loser husband." Because of her husband's incapability she had to work hard to support the family. Deep down inside she did not want to turn out this way. She believed, "A woman's responsibility is to take care of children and her husband, but the reality forces women to change their gender role." Apparently, her successful career did not change her traditional gender role ideology. Deep down inside she was still very traditional, particularly in the aspect of her expectation for her husband.

To my surprise, an overwhelming majority of men firmly supported their wife's employment. Gender does not seem to make a significant difference on this issue at the first glance. However, when asked to explain why they supported women's employment, men offered different explanations than women. Most husbands did not view their wife's employment as a way of improving their economic status at home. Instead, they viewed their wife's employment as helping to improve family financial situations and a way of keeping their wives occupied so that the husbands were able to have their own social time. In other words, the economic reality determines the gender roles of married couples. A male manager said, "I think even though many couples want to maintain a traditional family but our modern society doesn't allow them to remain traditional. The current situation in China is that so many

people are laid off, and how can they survive if they still hold their traditional ideology? Whoever is capable of should go out and work."

A computer software salesman expressed his concern of the traditional family model. He agreed that a wife's disconnection with society would hurt her marital communication with husband, but he also stressed that "if a woman stays at home her personality or temper may change. For example, when the husband gets home from work he's too tired and exhausted to talk, but the wife feels like she finally has someone to talk to." Evidently, the husbands disliked the traditional model not because they were concerned about their wives' financial independence but because they believed that model would negatively affect their own life quality and their freedom in a marriage would be diminished.

One middle-aged male government official with a doctoral degree in history shared his thoughts. He supported his wife's career but emphasized the significant role a husband plays in marital stability. He said,

A man must achieve something in his career. It doesn't necessarily mean he must have money. His achievement can include his knowledge, experience, and influence. If he wants respect at home, he must have power in society. I think respect is more important than romantic love. Romantic love doesn't last long, but respect does. Respect comes from achievement and temperament. This is very important. If a husband has these two things, responsibility and achievement, his marriage will be stable. These two things can earn respect from his wife and from society. I'd be happy if my wife earned more than me, and I wouldn't feel depressed if she was promoted higher than me, because deep down I know I have more knowledge than she does. It would probably take more than 10 years for her to catch up with me in terms of knowledge. I have this confidence, and my wife has confidence in me too.

He then summarized, "A man is like a tree branch, and a woman is the leave. If the tree branch is not strong, the leave will not be attached to it for long." His implication is whatever wives do will always be minor in due respect. His marriage was indeed stable in his mind, but when I talked to his wife, a researcher at China Social Science Academy, she told me that her major concern about her marriage was her husband's

male chauvinism. She said she would be more satisfied with her marriage if her husband were less male chauvinistic.

Clearly, although most husbands expressed their support for their wives' employment, they did believe that a marriage would lose its stability if wives were more successful in career than husbands. A husband, whose wife was a psychologist, said,

I hope my wife is able to care more about this family, and I believe the stability of family is determined by the husband's career. The family will not be stable if the wife does better than her husband financially. Of course there are cases where the husband is more successful than the wife, and their marriages are not stable, but generally speaking the husband's successful career determines the stability of family. I think women have an advantage, that is, they are more detail-oriented than men. They know how to take care of the family and children.

This remark truly reveals his view of gender roles of husband and wife. His wife was aware of how he thought about her. She believed that men and women were different. She said, "Men pay more attention to material conditions than emotional commitment. If they are served with a good meal, they will be happy and satisfied. But eating is not that important to women. My husband often complains that it's my fault that he and our son are not able to eat well. He said that I am not fulfilling a wife's responsibility." Hence, gender difference in husbands and wives' interpretations of the traditional family model is evident, which could potentially prevent the couples from achieving a real equal relationship in marriage.

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## Discussion and Conclusion

Using in-depth interviews, the present study investigates the potential risks of marital instability among urban Chinese couples in the context of economic change. I find several potential risks of marital instability caused by gender beliefs and expectations. These gender beliefs and expectations are uniquely reinforced rather than weakened by the rise of consumerism and materialism associated with China's economic transition. To challenge the increasing job demand

and job insecurity, as well as the increasing costs of childcare and education for children, married couples have created their gendered adaptive strategies (Hochschild and Machung 1989; Moen and Wethington 1992), that is, the husbands are likely to take high demanding and low stable but higher paid jobs whereas the wives are likely to take low demanding and high stable but lower paid jobs. This gendered division of labor is a response to the economic strains resulting from the shift from a planned economy to a market economy in China.

Both the wives and husbands in the study expressed their concerns and worries, and again a gendered pattern was found among those concerns and worries. In other words, the husbands and wives expressed their concerns following their traditionally defined gender roles. The husbands were mainly concerned about how well they performed as a breadwinner whereas the wives were mainly concerned about how well they performed as a caregiver. For example, I found in the study that the husbands were mainly concerned about the increasing demand and competition at workplace. They also had to face the increasing job insecurity. If this pressure was not big enough for them, the increasing costs of childcare and child education had caused great strains on the husbands to produce more income. All of these concerns reflect how husbands define their role at home. They still see themselves as significant breadwinners, and their wives' expectations and reactions to how well their husbands play their breadwinning roles reinforce the gendered division of labor (Thompson 1993; Zuo and Bian 2001). Apparently, the newly emergent market economy in China encourages men's traditional gender roles as much as it does women's traditional gender expectations for their husbands.

The increasing risk of men's health problems had particularly worried their wives in marriage. Many wives in the study expressed their concerns about their husbands' health conditions. What the wives were not happy about was that their husbands did not understand their concerns. The husbands interpreted their wives' care for their unhealthy lifestyles as a way of limiting their

freedom. Surprisingly, no husbands in the study expressed their concerns about their wives' health conditions. This result indicates the wives, working or not working, still perceived themselves as a caregiver and the husbands as a breadwinner even when they expressed their concerns. As Hochschild (2003) puts it, the very term of "care" is still mainly associated with women. The economic and social transformation in China does not reduce marital inequality. Instead, marital equality once achieved in the 1960s has been reduced to the extent that husbands and wives' interpretations of their marriage experience are still gendered, which may become potential risks of marital instability among married couples in urban China.

Although the husbands and wives still maintain gendered expectations for each other, they did take a step further away from the traditional breadwinner-homemaker model by embracing a dual-earner family structure. The wives in the study believed the traditional breadwinner-homemaker model did not work for them, because they did not want to lose their economic independence and power in marriage. They had seen and heard so much in the media how badly professional housewives were treated at home after they quit their work. They feared that their sacrifices were not worthwhile, and they themselves would end up being worthless and replaced by a younger woman. Most husbands in the present study did want their wives to work but they did not dislike the traditional model. They seemed to fit in Hochschild's transitional gender ideology (1997), in which husbands are more egalitarian in ideology than in behavior. A male government official said, "Being conservative is human nature, because the more conservative, the more stable, and the less cost. In other words, the more liberal the more cost." However, why did most husbands still want their wives to work outside the home in the present study? They explained that if their wives stayed at home full time they would constantly create a disturbance. They would call them to come home right away after work and wish them to spend more time with them at home. In this way the husbands

would lose personal freedom and social time with their own friends. It is evident that the husbands were concerned about the quality of their own life more than their marital equality.

In summary, despite its small sample size, the present study unravels the subjective meanings of potential risks of marital stability that urban Chinese couples are facing in current economic transition. Further studies need to investigate why those potential risks or unstable factors did not totally disrupt marital balance in the context of economic change in China. What really held those married couples together in the economic transitional times? In the meantime, I am also aware that findings of my qualitative study cannot be generalized toward the entire population until tested by large-scale studies using representative samples.

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# Empowered or Impoverished: Divorce and Its Effects on Urban Women in Contemporary China

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April Gu

Current efforts to alleviate poverty and wealth inequality in China overlook a growing demographic with untold influence on the economic future—divorced women. Divorced women in China are at a distinct economic disadvantage when compared to their male counterparts. Although once viewed as a tool for empowerment, divorce can in many cases lead to financial hardship for women, as the inequitable wage distribution between genders causes the higher, or sole, income to be lost. This chapter addresses this rapidly growing phenomenon.

This chapter will also discuss the results of questionnaires with 52 divorced women in Shanghai and Beijing, two of the most economically and culturally open cities in China. Furthermore, four varying but representative case studies are also explored in detail. An analysis of their responses will shed light on topics such as their financial condition, their housing situation, and how they view their options for remarriage, among others. Additionally, they will suggest how the government might utilize welfare and

community programs in order to improve the quality of their lives.

The goal of this research is to bring this overlooked population to attention before the continued lack of awareness causes creates financial difficulty for a growing number of women and undermines economic growth. By underscoring the remarkably similar difficulties that divorced women face across the world, I seek to emphasize our shared human experiences which are the same regardless of ethnicity, religion, and political boundaries. It is my hope that with continued scholarship in this field we will soon be able to more effectively tackle the unique challenges of divorced women everywhere.

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## Reasons for an Increased Divorce Rate

There are few social institutions in China that have changed as rapidly as divorce has in the past decades. Not long ago it was so much a taboo subject it was rarely discussed, much less practiced. Today divorce has largely become an accepted method of ending an unhappy marriage, particularly in the more progressive urban enclaves. Statistics document this significant change. From 1911 to 1948, the divorce rate was

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hardly existent at 0.06 % (Tang 2003).<sup>1</sup> The divorce rate remained under one percent until the late 1980s and grew to 2.73 % in 2005 (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2005), an outrageous high by Chinese standards. An average of one marriage out of 18 ended in divorce during the 1980s; by the 1990s, it was one per ten; estimates for the twenty-first century are one in six (Tang 2006).

Other factors also point to this shakeup of the traditional family structure. Expensive divorce companies have sprung up in cities to handle the increasing numbers of couples considering or seeking an end to their marriages. Numerous websites specifically for divorcees were launched in the past year. In 2006, the All-China Women's Federation and the China International Marriage and Family Association sponsored a training of marriage counselors in fields such as psychology, marriage law, child welfare, and cross-cultural marriages in Shanghai ("Shanghai Trains Marriage Counselors" 2006). Since then some of these counselors are operating a 24-hour divorce and relationship hotline in Shanghai (Xu 2007). Still other services include an influx of private detectives hired to spy on cheating spouses and boutique law firms specializing in divorce. Of course, recent divorce rate increases are not unique to China. However, unlike most other countries, China is experiencing a small explosion because there is no other place where the

aggregation of three factors—legal reform, social acceptance, and economic opportunity have created the atmosphere in which divorces flourish.

## Legal Reform

As early as 1931, the Chinese Community Party (CCP) promulgated marriage reform while still based in Jiangxi Province. Mao Zedong recognized the imbalanced structure of divorce, writing, "...on questions concerning divorce, it becomes necessary to protect the interests of women and place the greater part of the obligations and responsibilities entailed by divorce upon men" (Schram 1963). This decree provided the basis for the 1950 Marriage Law, one of the first laws passed by the CCP after their rise to power. It accomplished nothing short of a revolution on the traditional notions of marriage. Under the law, marriage was to be consensual and grounded in equal rights for the first time in Chinese history. This meant the abolishment of such long-held practices as child betrothals, concubines, matchmakers, and polygamy. The law further established the legal guidelines for divorce in Articles 17 through 25, addressing issues such as the divorce procedure, maintenance and education of the children after divorce, and the division of property (Ogletree and de Silva-de Alwis 2004). Most importantly, it recognized equal rights for both sexes in divorce.

Between 1953 and 1956 an estimated six million couples divorced (Liu 2001). However, even with the liberalization of divorce, only the educated elite in cities could afford to leave their unhappy unions. Peasant men were particularly resistant to the dangerous freedom this law provided their wives. Although the government hired volunteers to educate women about their new rights using a mixture of fictional stories, narratives and visual aids, the law was not heavily promoted or enforced outside of selected urban areas (Bullough and Ruan 1994). Unmarried women also faced dire financial alternatives; as a result the divorce rate remained largely unaffected.

The next spike in the divorce rate occurred in the late 1970s following the Cultural Revolution, spurred on by political reasons. If a couple did

<sup>1</sup> Since 1985, official data related to divorce is published yearly in the China Statistical Yearbook and the numbers are considered reliable (Wang 2001). However, until recently, all crude divorce rates, the number of divorces per thousand population, were defined and calculated using a method different from the accepted international norm. Rather than counting the number of couples divorced per thousand population, the data accounted for the number of individuals who were divorced per thousand instead. This in effect doubled the crude divorce rate for China and made it seem artificially high, hovering around the rates for Korea and Japan. This practice was changed following the efforts of Xu Anqi of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, who had campaigned for a change in the calculation of the crude divorce rate since the early 1990s (Zou 2007). However, because the recalibrated rates have not yet been released, this chapter will continue to report the old rates when describing years before 2006. If adjusted, it is predicted that the old rates will be cut by roughly half.

not subscribe to the same political ideals, or if one member fell out of favor with the party, it was acceptable, even expected, for them to divorce. The option of a no-fault divorce appeared in a revision of the Marriage Law in 1980 (Melnick 2000); however, if a woman did not assign blame, she would no longer be eligible for alimony or child support (Sly 1998). Moreover, the procedure for divorce was still complicated and time-consuming.

This changed with the third and most recent revision of the Marriage Law in 2001. Previously couples had been strongly encouraged to remain together, with cases dragging out in family court for years and divorce granted only with *danwei*, or workforce, approval. Now, it is possible to be divorced within 10 minutes, at an easily affordable cost of ten *yuan* (Watts 2005). Unhappy couples who had been hindered by the old process began divorcing in droves. The number of divorces in 2004 was 1.6 million, representing an all-time high and a 21 % increase from the previous year (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2004). Further details related to the 2001 Marriage Law will be discussed later in the chapter.

## Social Acceptance

Attitudes toward marriage and divorce have become much more progressive since the 1980s. The sociologist Pan Suiming wrote that the past 1,000 years, dominated by an agrarian society, established these norms for marriage: one, that it was mainly for the merging of assets and other property purposes; two, that it was sacrosanct and could not be broken; three, that the rights of men trumped those of women; and four, that it not only prohibited premarital sex but also demoted sexual life overall (Tang 2003). For women especially sex was not for pleasure but for reproduction. Indeed, *Li Ji, Hun Li*, one of an influential series of books written in 475 BC dictating moral customs, noted that the primary purpose of marriage itself was to honor the ancestors by continuing the genetic line with sons (Tang 2003). Marriages were arranged with the practicality of a business transaction. Preserving one's

position in society was preeminent so divorce was extremely rare.

This began to change in the latter half of the twentieth century with the rise in consciousness of women's rights. Old traditions had been on the wane for quite some time. A 1982 study found that the number of arranged marriages declined by 50 % between the years 1946 and 1949 (Bullough and Ruan 1994). Resisting conservative attitudes, most women still met their husbands through close friends or relatives, but with greater veto power on potential suitors, and the number of women who met their husbands through "casual activity" rose (Bullough and Ruan 1994). With greater power in the selection of husbands, women turned their eyes to improving the quality of their marriages. And after the establishment of legal reforms, they had a new option if others failed—divorce.

Thus the requirements for a suitable match shifted for both sexes. Basic survival and politics declined in importance for all but the most conservative villages. Equality, love, friendship, and self-realization gradually developed as essential qualities in a partner (Tang 2003). Significant strides were also made in sexual liberation. In a study conducted in 1998 on the attitudes of youth toward premarital sex, two-thirds of those surveyed answered that it was acceptable, and a full fifth chose "acceptable if both parties are willing" over more stringent criteria that required love or eventual marriage as a condition (Tang 2003). Critics have claimed that Western influence through movies or television has also altered the traditional view of marriage and set unattainably high standards for love and happiness.

However, through the 1970s divorce continued to be viewed as a shameful, immoral act that could ruin an otherwise healthy political career. This outlook relaxed considerably when increased economic prosperity and foreign influence, most notably after the introduction of Reform and Opening, challenged traditional family life. An analysis of divorce court cases by Gao and Liu in 1998 found that important factors that led to divorce were, in order of increasing frequency, hasty marriages, mistreatment of wives, affairs, conflicting personalities, splitting

up of chores, in-law difficulties, different attitudes toward life, and sexual incompatibility (Gao and Liu 1998). *Gan qing bu he*, roughly translated to “falling out of love,” was regarded as a frivolous excuse for separation. Now it is commonly cited as a reason for divorce. Public opinions have altered, and in the majority of cases, divorce is no longer an obstacle for promotion nor seen as an indication of lower ethical standards.

Even though national perception has changed regarding divorce, this does not mean that divorce is now widely accepted or casually mentioned, even in cities. In fact, it was not uncommon for me to meet women who were hiding their divorces from their parents. One woman, who had been divorced for five years, went to great lengths to ensure that her mother remained in the dark. This was all the more surprising because her son lived with his maternal grandmother. When asked why she would not confess, she replied that her mother would worry too much if she found out that her daughter was once again on her own. Keeping a secret was much easier despite all the inconvenience of living a lie.

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### Economic Opportunity

The economy has transformed markedly since the implementation of Reform and Opening in 1979. After nearly three decades of reform, China has developed from a struggling nation to a globally dominant economic force. It is not alone in undergoing periods of social change during its transition from a low-income economy. Economic growth has dramatically altered the religious or cultural customs and familial structures of many countries. For example, Ireland, which in less than 30 years grew from a less developed country (LDC) to boasting one of the world's highest levels of GDP per capita, only legalized divorce through a referendum vote in 1995, with one of the narrowest margins in history (Barnados 2002). Similar trends have occurred in Asian cities or countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, which have experienced high

growth rates. However, the rapid rise of the divorce rate in China is unequaled in any other country. Between 1979 and 1997 the divorce rate nearly tripled, a rise not mirrored anywhere else (Wang 2001).

For centuries Chinese women had no economic or political power and were dependent upon marriage for survival. Even in cases of physical or sexual abuse, women were often not willing to leave their husbands, much less seek formal separation, because they would no longer have access to shelter or food. A wife served only two functions: to give birth to sons and to please her mother-in-law. A survey run by 18 multinational corporations in October 2002 found the number of female middle managers dominated over males in joint-venture companies (Beech 2003). Today women are a vital component of the workforce, serving at various levels in all industries. Economic freedom leads to the ability to choose, and many more young women are prioritizing their careers above their personal lives. A poll of 5,223 women in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, and Shenzhen by the Renmin University of China in 2000 found the following listed as primary concerns: work (55 % of respondents), health (44 %), love (44.7 %), and family (34.7 %) (Liu 2001). The majority of women also felt that financial independence was the single most important right they had gained. The rise in the divorce rate in part reflects that more women are able to walk away from an unhappy or dangerous union.

On the flip side, the less savory effects of economic development also contribute heavily to divorce. Most notably, extramarital affairs are popping up in large numbers as businessmen find ample opportunity to cheat during trips away from home. Mistress villages or districts are common in booming commercial cities such as Shenzhen and Shanghai. A study sponsored by the Institute of Sexuality and Gender, Renmin University, found that extramarital affairs are the number one cause of divorce (Fan 2002). The study cited affairs as a significant factor in between 25 % and 35 % of all divorces although developed coastal cities often have a much higher



rate (Fan 2002). One law firm in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, handling 395 cases from 1995 to 1997 found that 216, or 54.7 % of cases, cited instances of unfaithful behavior (Fan 2002). Couples filing for divorce in Wuxi, also in Jiangsu Province, cited affairs in 71 % of cases during the same 2-year period (Fan 2002). The oldest divorce company in Shangdong, an all-inclusive service provider with psychologists, lawyers, and even private investigators under one roof, claimed that 80 % of their cases involved a “third party,” or a mistress (Du 2007). The Chinese newspaper *Mirror* recently reported that family dramas depicting extramarital affairs would be banned from television because the storylines were incompatible with “the general environment for constructing a harmonious society” (“China to Show” 2007, “TV Regulator” 2006). The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) denied restricting content but vowed to impose stricter standards in prime time television beginning in February 2007. Television shows are limited to only “ethically inspiring” series and must pass censors at SARFT before they could be broadcast.

## Women and Divorce

Divorce has always impacted women differently from men. During much of Chinese history, divorce, when it occurred, could be instigated only by the husband who held all economic and social power. Even when this changed in the twentieth century, most women were wary of divorce. An inability to be self-supporting was one crucial reason. Following the Marriage Law of 1950, women in Shanghai would often refuse to turn their husbands in to local police even in cases of abuse or mistreatment because they were wholly financially dependent on them. Women were also worried about retaliation against themselves or their families. A Municipal Women’s Federation document from the time read:

[E]ven if women are suffering, [they] still don’t dare say anything because they’re afraid that if

they do their situation will get worse. Some protect their husband because they’re afraid something bad will happen to him during the course of the movement. Because of this, they say their marriage problems are caused by their own bad disposition (Diamant 2000, p. 52).

Even though a campaign was carried out to promote the 1950 Marriage Law shortly after its establishment, it was short-lived and ineffective on the whole. Women were hindered from claiming the rights promulgated by the law because no social services existed to support them once they did. As a result the quality of married life did not improve for the vast majority of women. In some instances women even protested against the law. First wives feared that the monogamy clause would cause their husband to leave them for his younger wife. They channeled this frustration against the other wives, accusing them instead of their husbands. This was observed by a mediator from the Women’s Federation:

A frequently encountered problem during mediation is that the number-one wife always wants to accuse the younger wife, even though she knows the fault lies with the husband. They’re afraid to criticize the husband, afraid to hurt his feelings. Even if the husband has committed a serious offense and has been detained by the court, she will come weeping to court and request his release. She says that otherwise he’ll be even worse toward her when he’s released, and that this is the only way they’ll be able to reconcile. (Diamant 2000, p. 56)

Secondary wives and concubines worried they would be thrown out on the street. Many were drawn from low-income households and had been cut off from their families for years. They had no means of supporting themselves and were loath to return to their own hometowns in the countryside. Cities did not provide temporary shelter or job training for women who sought help after divorce.

So although the Marriage Law of 1950 did result in the first “divorce boom,” separation remained out of reach for most women because of the lack of economic opportunities. Strong social stigma against divorcees also prevented couples from divorcing. From the typical woman’s perspective, divorce could not be possible

unless they were offered many more and higher quality job opportunities. By contrast, after China's economy began to burgeon during the 1980s, 70 % of all divorces were initiated by women (Liu 2001). Clearly, by this time, women felt that their wages had progressed to the point where they could adequately support themselves. In addition, women received lower returns to marriage and less advantages than men did, particularly during the latter years of economic reform (Bishop et al. 2005).

However, we should not be so quick to jump to the conclusion that divorce is a method of empowerment. Numerous studies have demonstrated that women are worse off after divorce. In the United States, for example, single women are more likely to be poor and more divorced women with children fall below the poverty line than their married counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau 1993). A comprehensive study of Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Sweden also demonstrated that women's income is more severely affected than that of men (Andreß et al. 2006). Because of many factors, women's finances tend to deteriorate to a greater degree following divorce, particularly in countries where the wage inequality is still large.

One significant reason for this gap is education. Although China has made commendable improvements in equalizing education, women still lag behind men in educational attainment. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 86.5 % of women are literate compared to 95.1 % of men (2005). The 2000 Census reported that men receive an average of 1.3 more years of education than women, and this difference is far more pronounced in the countryside, where long-established notions of a woman's place in the home still reign supreme. Less than a third of students who are doctoral candidates are female (National Bureau of Statistics). Chinese women also earn an average of \$4,561 in terms of purchasing power parity, \$2,598 less than men; the ratio of estimated female to male income is 0.64 (UNDP Human Development Report 2006). As the value of human capital, measured primarily through education, heightens under the turn to a market-based economy, women lag behind men

in average years of schooling, and the gender gap in education declines at a much slower rate than the increase in return to education (Shu 2004). Scholarship has also suggested that the transition to a market economy and the abandonment of gender quotas actually increases gender discrimination in the workplace. Managers are wary of the added costs of pregnancy and child care (Hannum 2005). As a result, divorced women with children overwhelmingly suffer financial losses as they are crowded out of the labor market.

As written by Chen Xiaoming in *Women's Rights: Focus on the Marriage Law*, approximately 51.6 % of families living in urbanized areas led by a divorced single mother have a yearly salary that is less than the salary of the average worker in China (2002). In the countryside, where women are more vulnerable and bound by traditional forces, divorce is still not a viable option on many occasions. There are many cases in which a woman is forced to leave her child behind after a divorce as she leaves her village to find work, discouraging other women from doing the same. Over three-quarters of single mothers in rural areas lose their houses or their contracted land, leaving them with no means of survival (Chen 2002).

Finally, due to a variety of factors, women, particularly older women, are less likely to remarry and thus improve their economic situation. Remarriage is still a relatively new concept and viewed unfavorably by many conservatives. The trend in China has been for middle-aged men to seek young wives who are between 20 and 30 years of age, women who have never been married before and do not come with any large responsibilities such as debts or children. Indeed, it is particularly difficult for a woman with a male child to find a husband because of the economic burden a boy brings to his family. Although it is shifting, tradition still calls for the groom to buy a house before marriage, so a boy also represents an expensive purchase that must be made eventually. Most men do not want this liability.

Women are expected to be the primary caretaker of children. I have also had many women remark to me that they thought it was only natural

for them to take the children, either because of societal pressure or because they did not trust their husband to properly care for the children. For this reason the child is usually placed with his or her mother following a divorce. Although daycare centers are readily available for urban women, the toll that being a single parent takes on their careers, as well as the rising cost of child-care, is financially problematic. Due to China's one-child policy, the child dependency ratio has decreased, but more and more women are only children themselves. Thus, while caring for their children, they must handle the pressures of supporting their aging parents alone, tasks which are overwhelming for any family, much less a single-parent family. China does not have adequate social support programs for such conditions (see Ogletree and de Silva-de Alwis 2004).

## Research Method

Divorce, as a function of economics, appears very different from the viewpoint of a female peasant or farm worker and a college-educated woman who enjoys an office job. Unfortunately, the research does not include women from the countryside, and I would like to encourage further research on this as it is certainly a worthwhile topic. However, due to the conservative nature of the countryside, and the fewer economic opportunities that are available to women there, the divorce rate in lower-income provinces are markedly different than that of larger and more liberal cities.<sup>2</sup> Divorce clubs, divorce lawyers,

and companies catering to the newly separated are also much more organized in cities. As such, my study was done with urban populations, since this allowed more access to more divorced women in a shorter span of time. Research was advised and aided by Zhang Yi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). After much consideration cooperation was established with a Shanghai law firm and a Beijing match-making agency.

This decision was based on several factors. First, because a high percentage of the clientele for both organizations was divorced, there were many women who could be surveyed and interviewed. Second, as the law firm and matchmaking agency were both carefully selected to exclude upper-income women, we felt that the population observed, and the ensuing survey results, is more representative of a typical urban Chinese divorcee. It is for this reason that we eschewed divorce "companies." Though more and more women are using their services, they tend to charge anywhere from several hundred to several thousand *yuan* an hour depending on the services rendered (Du 2007), a fee far too high for the average divorcee to afford. Most importantly, both the law firm and the matchmaking agency have a reputation for being open and honest, a reputation later confirmed by many of their clients. Surveys were distributed over a period of three months from March to May of 2007, resulting in 12 completed surveys in Shanghai and 40 completed surveys in Beijing for a total of 52 surveys.

This survey is by no means comprehensive enough to be statistically representative of divorced women. It is also self-reported and as such inherent bias is unavoidable (e.g., no woman surveyed replied that she believed she was getting paid enough alimony or child support). Nevertheless I believe it provides a valuable snapshot of how divorced women are living, what their anxieties are, and in which areas they require support. By gathering this information together in one place, I seek to provide an inclusive understanding of their needs and concerns (Table 33.1).

<sup>2</sup>Due to the wide variation in development rates across China, the occurrence and effects of divorce are different depending on province. As a rule divorce rates are typically higher in areas with higher urbanization for several reasons. First, communication methods are more effective so more couples will be informed of divorce laws. Residents in cities also have easier access to the resources needed to obtain a divorce such as lawyers and a court system. Citizens possessing an urban *hukou* generally possess higher education levels and more plentiful job opportunities than in rural regions. Social stigma and other associated costs with leaving a marriage are lower. This enables more women to seek a life outside of marriage.

**Table 33.1** Basic survey results

Survey No.	Birth year	Education at time of marriage	Education at time of divorce	Salary at time of divorce	Current salary	No. of children	Sex of child 1	Age of child 1	Cost of child 1	Who child 1 lives with	Sex of child 2	Age of child 2
1	1974	College	College	5,000	5,000	0						
2	1951	College	College	2,500	2,500	1	Female	25				
3	1968	College	College	4,500	4,500	0						
4	1974	College	College	2,300	2,300	1	Female	7	400	Mother		
5	1957	Junior High	Junior High	1,000	1,000	1	Female	16	400	Father		
6	1980	High School	High School	1,700	1,800	1	Male		500	Father		
7	1973	Junior High	Junior High	1,500	1,500	1	Male	7	600	Father		
8	1968	High School	High School	0	0	1	Male	7	600			
9	1983	Junior High	Junior High	1,600	1,600	0						
10	1974	Junior High	Junior High	0	0	1		4	400	Father		
11	1972	College	College	1,500	2,000	1	Female	11	1,500	Father		
12	1976	College	College	2,000	2,000	1	Female	3		Mother		
13	1969	High School	High School	Unpredictable	Unpredictable	1	Male	14	500	Mother		
14	1964	High School	High School	841		1	Female	18	2,000			
15	1969	High School	High School			1	Female		300			
16	1965	High School	High School	2,500	3,000	1	Male	17		Mother		
17	1973	High School	High School	1,200	1,500	1	Female	3		Father		
18	1958	High School	High School	90	1,000	1	Female	25	1,500	Mother		
19	1963	High School	High School	1,000	1,000	1	Male	17	500	Father		
20	1956	Junior High	Junior High	1,000	2,000	1	Female	25	3,000	Mother		
21	1964	High School	High School	2,000	3,000	1	Female	18	1,000	Mother		
22	1957	High School	High School	200	1,300	2	Female	24	2,000	Mother	Female	20
23	1954	High School	High School	1,000	1,200	1	Male	25	1,500	Mother		
24	1973	Middle School	Middle School	700	800	1	Female	12	200			
25	1960	High School		150	800	1	Male	21	300	Father		
26	1969	High School	High School		1,500	1	Male	9				
27	1959	High School	High School	1,000	1,000	1	Male	19	1,000	Mother		
28	1960	High School	High School	1,700	2,000	1	Female	21	1,000	Father		
29	1954	Junior High	High School	900	1,500	1	Male	28	3,000	Father		
30	1969	College	College	2,000	2,000	1	Male	12				
31	1959	High School	High School	200	1,500	1	Male	21	800	Mother		
32	1963	High School	High School	700	5,000	1	Male	21	1,000			
33	1963	High School	High School			2	Male	20		Father	Male	10
34	1961	High School	High School	350	1,000	2	Male	26	400	Father	Male	24
35	1967	High School	High School	1,000	2,000	1	Male	15	300	Mother		
36	1950	Junior High	Junior High	46	1,001	1	Male	29		Mother		
37	1954	High School	High School	500	600	1	Female	27		Mother		
38	1959	College	College	3,000	5,000	1	Male	22	2,000			
39	1965	High School	High School	400		1	Male	18				
40	1970	High School	High School	10,000	1,000	0						
41	1967		High School	1,000	1,000	2					Male	15
42	1971	Community College	College	4,000	4,000	0						
43	1971	High School		900	2,000	1	Female	7	500	Father		
44	1968	High School	High School	4,000	4,000	2	Female	15	500	Mother		
45	1970	Junior High	Junior High	1,500	1,500	1	Female	11	500	Father		
46	1973		High School	5,000	5,000	1	Male	8	1,000	Mother		
47	1979	High School	High School	0	600	1	Female	4	200	Mother		
48	1957	Junior High	Junior High	Unpredictable	3,000	1	Male	17		Father		
49	1957	High School	College	800	1,100							
50	1966	College	College	1,200	5,000	1	Female	17	1,000	Mother		
51	1958	College	College			0						
52	1971	College	College	4,000	5,000	1	Female	9	800			
No. of responses	52	50	50	46	46	51	0	42	33	35	4	4

All costs are calculated in RMB on a monthly basis

Cost of child 2	Who child 2 lives with	No. of marriages	Age at first marriage	No. years married	Who initiated divorce	Parental expenses—father	Parental expenses—mother	Parental support—both	No parental support	Receive alimony?	Receive child support?	Child support amount	Would remarry?
		1	28	5	Wife				X	N			Y
		1	29	25	Husband				X	N	N		Y
		2	36	2	Wife				X	N	N		Y
		1	34		Husband	300				N	Y	500	Y
		2	41	8	Husband		200			N			Y
		1	22	2	Wife				X	N			Y
		1		8	Wife				X	N			N
		1	32	8	Wife				X	N			Y
		1	20	2	Husband				X	N	N		Y
		1	28	3	Husband				X	N			Y
		1	24	6	Wife		100			N			Y
		1	27	4	Wife				X	N	Y	300	Y
		1	23	10	Wife				X	N	N		Y
		1	24	3	Wife	1000							
		1	24	12	Wife			500					
		1	21	17	Wife				X	N	N		Y
		1	26	6	Husband				X	N			Y
		1	22	12	Wife				X	N	N		Y
		1	19	17	Wife			1,000		N	N		Y
		1	26		Wife						N		Y
		1	24		Wife			300		N	N		Y
1,000	Mother	1	26	20	Husband				X	N	N		Y
		1	26	26	Husband			500		N			Y
		1	20		Wife				X	N	N		Y
		1	24	4	Wife				X	N	Y		Y
		1	29	5	Wife		200			N			Y
		1	27	18	Husband					N	Y	350	Y
		1	25	14					X				Y
		1	23		Husband				X	N	N		Y
		1	23	15	Wife			500		N			Y
		1	24	14	Wife				X		Y	800	Y
		1	21	17	Wife				X	N	Y		Y
1,000	Mother	1			Husband				X	N			Y
500	Father	1	20	15	Wife		100						Y
		1	23	12	Husband				X	N	N		Y
		1	26	21	Husband				X	N	N		Y
		1	24		Wife				X	N	N		
		1	23	20	Wife				X	N	N		Y
		1	28		Wife				X	N			Y
		1	28	0.5	Wife			1,500					Y
1,000	Mother	1	22		Wife			600		N	N		Y
		1	28	8	Husband				X	N			Y
		1	27	5	Wife				X	N	Y		Y
		1	23	14	Husband		700			N	N		Y
		1	23	13	Wife					N			Y
		1	24	6	Wife		300			N		200	Y
		1	23	3	Wife				X	N	N		Y
		1	28	4	Wife			2,000		N	N		N
										N	Y		
		1	23	10	Wife				X	N	Y	4,000	Y
		1	30	10	Wife		300			N			Y
		1	26	7	Wife				X	N	Y	800	Y
4	4	51	49	42	50	2	7	8	31	45	30	7	48



## Survey Results

The profile of a divorced woman from these surveys emerged as thus (Tables 33.2, 33.3 and 33.4).

Most of the respondents were middle aged, the demographic that we were most interested in studying. Older women are more vulnerable, saddled with the responsibilities of children and aging parents and less adaptable to the changing forces of the marketplace. During observations of the matchmaking agency's weekend activities, it seemed that older and more conservative women were drawn to its services for the comfort and structure it supplied. Growing up in an era in which the practice of dating was rare, they likely turned to the agency to provide the go-between they were accustomed to using.

A high school education was the norm. The majority of women did not seek further education once married. Although the women who responded overwhelmingly sought divorces after the mid-1990s, in an average of 10 years of marriage, their monthly salaries have increased by 500 *yuan* to a median of 1,500 *yuan* or 18,000 *yuan* per year, much less than the average annual salaries in both Beijing and Shanghai, which are 34,191 *yuan* and 34,345 *yuan*, respectively. Still, when asked to rate their economic situation on a scale from one to five, one being poor and five being rich, roughly two-thirds selected the middle option, "so-so." "Not great" and "moderately well-off" made up most of the remainder (Table 33.5).

When asked for reasons why they were divorced, most women selected *ganqing buhe*, or "breakdown of affections," a vague term which often serves as the catch-all phrase to describe why a relationship failed, similar in English to "it just didn't work out." More noteworthy is the number of women, 19 of 52, or over one-third, who also mentioned that their husband's affair was a large contributor. This seems to indicate two conditions: first, that extramarital affairs are quite prominent within all strata of Chinese society, and second, that these women, unlike their mothers and grandmothers, are no longer satisfied to turn the other cheek. This is partly due to a change in the attitude and expectations that women have of marriage, but it is also significant that economic freedom (notwithstanding salary size) allows the women to express themselves. Other reasons for divorce, in order of frequency, are domestic violence, emotional mistreatment, difficulty in adjusting to living together, long distances, a change in attitude after a rise in social or economic status, and sexual incompatibility. Some respondents also wrote in unique reasons. "My husband's older and younger brothers were concerned that if my husband and I did not have children and the marriage continued, all his property would pass on to me." Others complained of their in-laws, gambling, lechery, and machismo. No women selected the option, "I engaged in an extramarital affair," although whether this is really true or due to an unwillingness to admit a fault cannot be ascertained.

**Table 33.2** Personal information

	Median	Mean	Total respondents
Age	42	42.52	52
Education level at time of marriage	High School	High School	50
Education level at time of divorce	High School	High School	50
Salary at time of divorce (monthly)	1,000	1,076	46
Current salary (monthly)	1,550	2,111	46
No. of children	1	0.96	51
Age of child	17	16.07	42
No. of marriages	1	1.04	51
Age at marriage	24	25.45	49
No. years married	9	10.27	42

**Table 33.3** Expense information (monthly RMB)

	Median	Mean	Total respondents
Child expenses	600	945.45	33
Child support amount	500	992.90	7
Parental expenses: father	650	650	2
Parental expenses: mother	200	271.43	7
Parental expenses: both	550	862.50	8
No parental support	—	—	31

**Table 33.4** Divorce information

			Total respondents
Who initiated divorce	Wife—35	Husband—15	50
Who child lives with	Mother—17	Father—18	35
Receive child support?	No—20	Yes—10	30
Receive alimony?	No—45	Yes—0	45
Would get remarried?	No—2	Yes—46	48

**Table 33.5** Reasons for divorce (respondents could choose multiple)

Reason	No. of responses
Breakdown of affections	27
Difficulty in adjusting to living habits	8
Living apart (long term)	7
Sexual incompatibility	4
Husband's extramarital affair	18
Own extramarital affair	0
Domestic violence	10
Psychological abuse and torture by husband	8
Incompatibility following the rise of husband's social and economic position	5
Incompatibility following the rise of your own social and economic position	1

However difficult the divorce, all but two of those who answered did want to get remarried (four ignored the question). I observed that unlike most of the men, the women were not at the matchmaking agency to seek a casual relationship. Remarriage can provide many benefits for women such as an improved financial situation, another means of emotional support, and a father figure for her child, as well as intimate companionship. "I am...warm, I know how to love, and I need love," a woman wrote in. "Being a single

woman in this society is too hard," said another, "and without education and skills, divorce is such a huge strike against her." Others wrote that they needed to find their "other half," "someone to look after," or a "whole family." On the other hand, one respondent noted that she was afraid that getting married again would ruin her life as it did before. "I am scared of not being happy after I get married," she wrote, "so I might as well not get married at all." Another woman simply wrote in, "I'm too tired!" Indeed, the competition for a husband is tough. A brief analysis of the women who were clients of the matchmaking agency by looking at questionnaires they filled out when signing up revealed a rather homogenous group. Nearly everyone was searching for a man who had a stable job, a house, and preferably a car, with the first two requirements appearing nearly one hundred percent of the time. Meanwhile, one of the loudest complaints against the agency was that the men who attended its functions nearly always wanted to find a young 20-something girlfriend and were not looking to get serious.

Having a child is a huge obstacle to remarriage. Most of the women surveyed had only one child, and due to their age, their children tended to be older with a median age of 17. Having an older child can be a double-edged sword. Mature children may leave the house and begin to earn wages for themselves and their parents, decreasing

expenditure for the woman. But should the child choose to attend college, the financial burden can be severe for a low-income household. Respondents with older children, particularly teenagers, reported a higher monthly cost than those with younger children still in elementary or middle schools. However, as a result of China's strict birth control policy, most women had only one child to support. It is estimated that only two percent of ex-husbands in China pay child support (Gu 2006). Out of the 30 respondents in the survey, ten women reported receiving monthly payments, far better than the national average.

A lack of money and difficulty in finding emotional support are the two greatest concerns of divorced women. Loneliness and low spirits were additional problems. The vast majority of women also dealt with friends, children, or parents and other family members who did not understand why they divorced or disapproved of the act. Many women reported feeling victimized by gossip. Thirty-nine women said these issues significantly affected their work efficiency, which in turn influenced their chances for future promotions and pay raises. Rising inflation will aggravate this situation and could be an additional battle that many divorced women and single mothers will have to face in the upcoming years. Many economists predict rates of around 4 % or 5 % in the coming years, led mainly by a hike in food prices (McGregor 2007). Financial analysts also point out that this problem will not be readily resolved as the amount of arable land and water resources grows more limited; indeed, desertification is one of China's foremost problems.

Another pressing problem was affordable housing, growing ever rarer in the booming markets of Beijing and Shanghai. Unable to buy a house or rent in a convenient location, a plethora of women were now living with parents or friends after their divorce. One woman reported to me that she lived with her son in his dorm room at college. In numerous other cases where the judge declined to leave the apartment to either party, the divorced ex-husband and ex-wife continued to live together for years. One primary weakness with the Marriage Law lies in that even though it

guarantees equal division of all assets accumulated during the marriage, many women have very limited knowledge of how much property or wealth their husbands actually have (Ogletree and de Silva-de Alwis 2004).

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## Case Studies

Interviews were conducted during the same time as surveys and included both women who had participated in surveys and those who did not, but all women face problems that are representative of obstacles for divorced women across China. The majority of women were clients of the match-making agency or visitors at one of its weekend functions, and we spoke either at a karaoke bar, one of its mingling events, or at a teahouse afterwards. Some of the women interviewed did not possess the *hukou*, or residency registration, of the city they were currently living in. This further complicates their situation because a worker living in, for example, Beijing, and not possessing a Beijing *hukou* is unable to enroll her child in a Beijing school or enjoy government-provided social services.

### *Case One: Ms. M*

Ms. M is closing in on 50. Her son is 20 years old and a volleyball referee. Since the divorce five years ago he has been living with his grandmother even though Ms. M chooses to keep the divorce a secret from her mother because "she [her mother] would worry too much." Her husband first brought up the idea of divorce but only after she discovered that he had been having an affair. Her husband runs a gambling operation and allows her to rent out a mahjong table and keep the proceeds. Her only expense is supplying customers with cheap tea and this way she is able to make two to three thousand *yuan* a month, a decent sum. Other than that she lives off her meager savings and worries constantly about job security. She has a cordial relationship with her husband and will occasionally even accompany him and his girlfriend, the woman he had an affair with, to dinners. She claims that the marriage was very smooth, and as hurt as she was by the affair, she strove for a "balanced divorce." They were both willing to compromise, they didn't want to argue or become personal enemies. The breakup was harmonious and the assets were split evenly with the exception of the apartment, which he kept. She is not actively looking to get remarried because it's too difficult, as her son makes her

especially unattractive to men. Because her financial situation is stable at the moment, her main problem is loneliness. The reason she participates in these matchmaking activities is not because she wants to find her "other half," but because she is bored on weekends and wants to make more friends.

The case of Ms. M demonstrates several challenges that divorce women face. First, she agreed to give her husband the apartment in return for the mahjong table. However, under the law, the apartment most likely would have been allocated to her as she is the main provider for their child, still a minor at the time of divorce (Ogletree and de Silva-de Alwis 2004). Ignorance of the law and failure to seek help out of shame or shyness is the downfall of many women, as it prevents them from receiving their fair share in the divorce settlement. Ms. M repeatedly stressed during the beginning of the interview that she did not want to get remarried although she later emphasized her loneliness throughout the remainder of our talk. After many attempts to find a serious relationship, she was on the verge of giving up, and she was aware that her son could be a serious obstacle. She believes that men might date her, but they would never marry her because they would need to help pay for her son's wedding and house, and nobody is willing to take on this burden.

*Case Two: Ms. L*

Ms. L is a woman with a strong voice and personality, over 40 years of age. She sought a divorce seven years ago when she decided no longer to tolerate her husband's physical abuse and extramarital affairs. However, during the divorce proceedings the judge ordered them to continue to live together after learning that neither one could afford a house on his or her own. He received the master bedroom because he had custody of the child, and retains a bedroom even though the child has now grown and left. Her husband will often return home drunk in the middle of the night and hit her, then claiming not remembering anything in the morning. She cannot leave because she has no money, and because they still live together, she cooks and cleans because he refuses to. Her dream is to live by herself, sleep, and eat whatever she wants. However, this does not seem feasible, as the quickest way for her to be financially independent from her husband is to find a new husband with an apartment of his own. Unfortunately she hasn't yet found a man her age who is interested in

a relationship with a woman of her age. She would like to meet white collar men with more money but they do not frequent the matchmaking service she uses. She tried to register at a matchmaking agency for higher-income clients but they required 800 *yuan* and a college diploma which she didn't have. If she did find somebody else to marry, she would be willing to just leave her current apartment to her ex-husband.

*Case Three: Ms. X*

Ms. X is 53 and has been divorced for two years. Her personal finances have deteriorated considerably since her divorce because her husband made much more than she did. In her previous position she barely made 1,000 *yuan* every month and is moving from Beijing to Shenzhen for three years in order to find a higher paying job as an accountant. She was raised to think that men's wages should naturally be higher than women's, because it is a man's duty to support the family while women take care of the house. Currently she is living in a dorm in her 27-year-old son's university because the court gave the apartment to her ex-husband. She worries about her son constantly because he is her last hope, her sole source of support once she is too old to work. Ideally she would like to lessen the pressure on him by getting remarried to a man with a steady income and a home, but the competition is too fierce and she is too old. Asked why she divorced at 51, she replied, "The same as everybody else: he had an affair."

The question of housing rules over a divorce. The first case with Ms. L is representative of many in which the woman and the husband are confined to the house together. This will predictably raise conflicts for both parties and the frustration in continuing to share household responsibilities and finances can be overwhelming. But in the end, it is the lack of privacy that is the hardest for both women to bear. Ms. X lives in her son's crowded dorm room with between six and eight other roommates because she cannot find affordable housing within a reasonable distance from her job. Her move to Shenzhen is partly to raise her standard of living but also to give her and her son some much needed space. Ms. L reports that her husband brings home girlfriends on a regular basis but often orders her around as if she were still his wife. Without the economic means to escape, she is in effect still married to her ex-husband even with the divorce. Her hopes of remarriage mirror the hopes of Ms. X and countless other women who, unable to

support themselves, view remarriage as their only real way of finding a place to call home.

*Case Four: Ms. B*

Ms. B has been divorced for two years. Her son is 12 years old and lives with his grandparents because she fears she is unable to provide a “whole home” for him. Currently she lives in a hotel, but she says that her marriage was so bad she didn’t even take finances into consideration when contemplating a divorce. Since her divorce she has attended activities hosted by many matchmaking companies and finds a common complaint with all of them: the women and men attend with incompatible goals. Women want a good match while the men mostly attend for fun and do not seek any real responsibility. She complains that the first question she gets asked in conversations is how old she is; then the men gauge their interest from there. Still, overall, independent life is better, and she is happy to have the chance to start over and live her own life.

The most common complaint from all the divorcees I spoke to at the matchmaking agency was that they could not find men who wanted to be serious with them. Women reported to me that, for their current or past spouses, a young mistress was a status symbol that reflected the owner’s wealth and high position in society. Young women are often willing to comply because older men may be able to supply them with material goods that younger men cannot. In this demanding environment older women may find a rewarding relationship nearly impossible. Another interviewee had decided that she was through with Chinese men for these reasons and was focusing on dating foreign, mostly American, men on the Internet instead. Luckily for her she spoke some English and was able to communicate fairly well. Other women do not have this option.

Asked what would help divorced women the most, respondents answered with a combination of support from friends, social security, and a support group that would help temper the loneliness. Following their divorces, many women felt little support from their parents and colleagues and turned instead to fellow divorcees who understood what they were going through. Several women also mentioned that a government-funded and government-operated matchmaking agency would be useful. The agency could ensure that people of all socioeconomic backgrounds could mix together and would be more trustworthy and

accountable than many of the private agencies that were operating in all major cities. Scandals abound of matchmaking agencies that made fraudulent promises to lure in more clients. On the legal front, they would be like workshops that educate them on their rights in a divorce regarding property distribution and child custody. There is a growing movement to compensate divorced women who sacrificed their own education and career for their husband’s by allowing them to share in his post-divorce earnings (Ogletree and de Silva-de Alwis 2004). As it is, the Marriage Law guarantees certain rights but often lacks the will or power to properly enforce them. Moreover, as Melnick states in her paper, “divorcing under China’s current divorce system assumes an underlying gender equality that does not exist” (2000). Unbalanced hiring and firing practices favor men, as do considerable pay disparities. Until 2005 male bosses could sexually harass their female employees with impunity (Parish et al. 2006). Unfortunately, due to a weak court system and indifferent judges, many of the regulations that are intended to protect women can end up having the opposite effect (Melnick 2000).

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## New Challenges

The proliferation of divorce will produce new features and challenges to Chinese society. If China follows a path similar to that of its fast-growing East Asian neighbors, the divorce rate is likely to grow as the economy becomes increasingly market-driven and migrants continue to flow into the city (Wang 2001). No doubt there will be greater numbers of single-parent households in the future, and both men and women must learn to grapple with the difficulties of simultaneously raising a child and advancing a career. As a result of the one-child policy, divorcees must cope with the emotional and financial burden of supporting both their parents without help from a spouse or sibling. Both formal and informal separations between migrant workers and their spouses destroy traditional family ties in the countryside. And with no official organizations to regulate matchmaking agencies,



divorcées complain that outrageous scams are all too common. Identifying the divorce trend and predicting its ramifications are a necessity. Making and enforcing laws to protect the vulnerable is essential. There are no easy solutions to any problem in a society this complex, much less one made so unwieldy by such rapid transformations. But divorce does not represent, as some have claimed, the demise of moral or ethical values. Rather, it speaks most accurately to the fluidity of modernization and the reactions of the Chinese people as they adapt to their era of economic success. How they accomplish this adaptation will be no small feat, and one that will affect the world's understanding of the changes China has endured and the changes yet to come.

## Notes

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Maurice Choi Kwok-To

Under the influence of positivism, sociology has inherited the tradition of the natural sciences and attaches importance to facts. According to Max Weber, a sociologist should be an objective observer and put aside personal values for the time being, in order to be value-free in undertaking studies (Berger 1963). In the past, the words “I” and “me” were rarely seen in articles published in sociology journals. However, as pointed out by the postmodernist school, even if we endeavour to suppress the self, it will still come out in the process of writing (Richardson 1979). Smith (1987) illustrates with examples the idea that the objects we choose to describe and the words used to describe them will reflect our social position, such as sex, race or social class, without our knowing it. Therefore, it is very difficult to be value-free. Since it is difficult to detach the self from one’s work, why not try to understand oneself from a sociological perspective?

As Mills pointed out (1970, pp. 14–15), we can use our sociological imagination to distinguish between the troubles of our personal milieu and the public issues of the society in which we live. He also emphasizes that personal

troubles are caused by public issues. He takes unemployment as an example. When one person is unemployed in a city of ten thousand residents, the problem has to be tackled at a personal level. However, when 15 million people are unemployed in a country with a population of 50 million, it is a public issue, which cannot be solved at a strictly personal level. How the economic and political systems of the place have led to unemployment must be taken into account. By the same token, when faced with troubles, it may be of interest to know whether the people next door have the same kind of troubles, in which case they may be social problems affecting people generally.

I also have certain personal issues, one of which arises from doubts about the traditional division of family roles. Why should men attach importance to career and women to family? Would life not become too monotonous and boring if it is entirely devoted to toiling and earning a living? Because of work, we may neglect matters in life that deserve to be treasured, such as opportunities to be close to our children. When they get married, we will forever wish we had spent more time with them, a regret which no amount of money can compensate for. Thus, I hope to treasure the opportunities to associate with my children. I shall not mind staying at home to take care of housework and children.

However, men who hold this view are still in the minority. Since childhood, I have had many

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strange ideas, regarding myself as a “freak”. I did not realize that far from being a freak, I am just someone who does not want to blindly follow the mainstream. Thus, I hope to reflect more and to understand myself from the perspective of sociology. Why, in contrast to the majority, am I willing to accept the idea of “men inside, women outside”? Are there other people who think like me? Is the force with which society controls us absolutely irresistible? These are all questions I hope to answer through this research.

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## Literature Review

### What Is Gender Stereotyping?

We may regard gender stereotyping as wrongly linking sex with gender. Sex refers to the physiological distinction between male and female—mainly by way of the genitals and genes. Gender is constructed by culture and divides us into women and men. Men and women respectively play roles with different characteristics and they are subject to different societal expectations. For example, people usually think that men are always independent, rational, active and self-confident, while women are dependent, emotional, passive and delicate (Basow 1992). Because men and women are regarded as having different talents, they are assigned different tasks regardless of circumstances. This kind of division of labour is based on gender stereotypes rather than individual ability.

### Impact of Gender Stereotypes on the Family

As a result of gender stereotypes, husband and wife play different roles in the family. People in general accept the family model of “men outside, women inside”. Lips (1994) thinks that men represent the head of the family while women represent the heart of the family. So the man should feed the family by working, and the wife should stay at home and take care of housework and children, supporting the family emotionally.

Parsons and Bales (1955) similarly think that a family requires the fulfilment of instrumental and expressive roles. The man plays the instrumental role, being responsible for problem-solving and external contact; the woman plays the expressive role, being responsible for domestic conflict resolution and emotional support for the family.

Based on gender stereotypes, housework is also divided into masculine tasks and feminine tasks. The husband has to undertake masculine tasks such as snow shovelling and maintenance, while the wife undertakes feminine tasks such as dishwashing, cooking and sweeping (Blood and Wolfe 1960).

### Who Is the Victim of Gender Stereotyping?

The purpose of housework division should be to give play to the talents of husband and wife respectively so that both parties are satisfied. However, this kind of labour division is not equal. Quite a few feminists think that patriarchy is the source of inequality. Patriarchy endows the husband with power as the head of the family, with the result that the wife can only be his dependent (Philpot et al. 1997). The studies of Oakley (1974) and Blood and Wolfe (1960) point out that women have to undertake most housework, but as they are not paid for doing housework, it is not regarded as work. Women staying at home thus have no productivity and are dependent on their husband for economic support. In this way, the husband's power in the family is sustained, and the wife often finds herself in an underprivileged position. Nonetheless, in contemporary society, most families are dual-income-earner families, in which both husband and wife have to work outside the home. The wife has economic power of her own and no longer depends solely on the husband. On the other hand, the research of Berardo et al. (1987) points out that even when women are engaged in high-income professions like medical doctor, professor and lawyer, they still have to do most of the housework. From this it can be seen that not economic income but gender stereotyping is the prime factor leading to inequality.

Since the advent of feminism, many people have begun to pay attention to difficulties encountered by women at home, but men are also the victim of gender stereotyping. Synthesizing quite a few scholars' findings, Philpot et al. (1997) point out that, as most children are still taken care of by the mother, the concept of "men outside, women inside" has deprived many a father of the opportunity to associate closely with his children. Pleck and Sawyer (1974) think that if men are too concerned with masculine behaviour, they are likely to develop gender role strain. According to Pleck's (1995) definition, gender-role strain consists of three concepts: gender role discrepancy, gender role trauma and gender role dysfunction. When the ideal male image does not match the actual image, gender-role discrepancy will result, which may adversely affect the self-esteem of the man as well as his psychology. Gender-role trauma refers to trauma suffered by the man in the process of becoming the ideal male. Gender-role dysfunction refers to the negative impact that may arise even when the man succeeds in becoming the ideal male, because certain masculine attributes have side effects. For instance, placing a premium on career may cause men to lose opportunities to associate closely with their children.<sup>1</sup>

From that it can be seen that gender stereotyping brings both men and women negative impact. On the one hand, it will lead to gender-role strain and psychosomatic trauma. On the other hand, it limits personal choice and prevents people from choosing their own mode of living based on their own desires, regardless of their gender. Therefore, we need to explore and pursue options apart from gender stereotypes.

### Options Apart from Gender Stereotypes

Corey and Corey (2005) propose two ways to break through gender stereotypes. The first one is androgyny, a concept which overthrows the

male–female dichotomy. Traditionally, masculinity and femininity are considered to be mutually exclusive, but the Bem Sex Role Inventory proposed by Bem (1993) divides human beings into four types. Those who score highly in both masculinity and femininity are androgynous; those with a low score in both domains are undifferentiated (see Diagram 34.1). Androgynous people possess characteristics of both men and women and are able to combine these distinct characteristics flexibly. So we may regard androgynes as people who possess at once the merits of males and females.

Another possibility of breaking through gender stereotypes is going beyond gender. Although the concept of androgyny breaks through the traditional gender polarity, it is still based on gender polarity. Androgynes at the same time possess masculine and feminine characteristics, which implies that the concept of androgyny is still constructed on the concepts of masculinity and femininity. After presenting the concept of androgyny, Bem (1993) also points out that this concept will strengthen gender polarity. Hence, Basow (1992) thinks that androgyny is just a stepping stone on the journey of human beings to a better society (see Diagram 34.2). In her ideal society, human characteristics are no longer divided into masculine and feminine, so that people's mode of living is no longer linked to their physiological sex. Only in this way can human beings cast off the yoke of gender.

### Imagining the Future Family

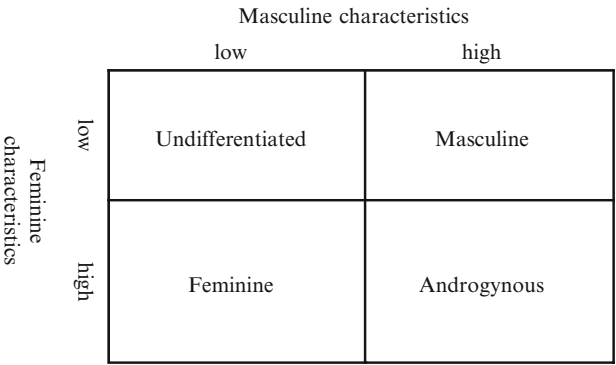
The above argument shows possibilities other than traditional gender stereotypes. However, not everybody is conscious of these options. Will the future family model follow the above-mentioned direction? Bernard (1982) thinks that one way to envision future marriage is to start from young people's expectations of the future, because what they think and dream is, precisely, an important constituent of the future.

Adams (2004) points out that sociology by and large ignores the influence of imagination on social life. But from where is imagination

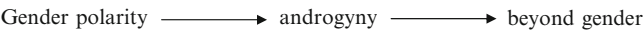
<sup>1</sup> Pleck's research is primarily about men, but his theory of gender role strain also applies to women.



**Diagram 34.1** Four types of gender roles



**Diagram 34.2** Process of breaking through gender stereotypes



derived? Adams quotes views of different scholars in order to answer this question. Thoden Van Velzen (as cited in Adams 2004) thinks that imagination is derived from social forces like normative structures. Christin (as cited in Adams 2004) thinks that imagination is derived from reality, but reality is also derived from imagination. In other words, although social structures limit our imaginative space, we can still create the future through imagination. When the imaginations of a group of individuals are combined together, the group will be able to give rise to societal changes.

**Methodology**

**Autobiography**

In this research, I made a novel attempt at self-analysis. Mills (1970, p. 12) points out that biography, history and society are connected with one another. It follows that biography helps us understand society. In my autobiographical research, I played the dual-participant-observer role (Merton 1988, p. 12). By means of this approach, I was able to indulge in in-depth analysis of personal experiences, because other people could not conduct what essentially amounts to retrospective introspection (Merton 1988, p. 18).

In practice, I questioned myself about different topics by way of self-interrogation and Q & A. For example, I first asked myself, “Why do I have the idea of ‘men inside and women outside’?” And then I put down a number of possible answers. Other questions arose in turn from answering this question. For example, when I thought one of the answers was non-attachment of importance to career, I went on to ask myself, “Why do you not attach importance to career?” Then I again put down the answers and recorded any new questions. In the process of continuous self-interrogation, I obtained certain relevant information for later analysis.

My Initial self-analysis was useful for subsequent research. First of all, the data obtained through self-analysis enabled me to explore my own experiences as a case study, which helped to establish the research questions and clarify what kinds of questions should be asked in later interviews. Moreover, through self-analysis, I was able to provide certain theories for the research topics, facilitating comparative studies of other cases at a later date. For example, I found that both family background and partner were conducive to the formulation of my idea of “men inside, women outside”. Therefore, when analysing other interviewees’ circumstances, I would also pay attention to the influence of family and partner.

## Interviewing Other People

After completing the exercise of self-reflection, I interviewed three pairs of undergraduate partners in the form of semi-structured interviews and on a one-to-one basis. The first couple held a more traditional view of family-role division. I hoped to learn from them how this view came into being. In contrast, the second couple held a more open and flexible attitude towards family-role division. As their view was close to mine, it was possible to compare the similarities and find out why we held an open attitude towards family-role division. The male interviewee of the third couple had grown up in a single-parent family (taken care of by the mother). By comparing this interviewee, who came from an atypical family background, with other cases, I hoped to understand how family background influences our vision of the future family. Through interviewing specific interviewees, I hoped to comprehend their concept of the gender-role division of labour. I thus hoped to trace the source of these attitudes, in order to understand the ways in which social structures control us, and to find out how to resist them.

## Autobiography

I grew up in a somewhat traditional family. My father has a printing business, and my mother works in his company. At home, my mother is responsible for cooking, cleaning and washing, while my father only undertakes such housework as repair of electrical appliances and plumbing. Although both father and mother have to work outside, the concept of “men outside, women inside” still determines the division of responsibilities within the home.

I have a definite image of my future ideal family. I expect to live in a family with the man taking care of the inside and the woman of the outside. My partner will be responsible for the economic income of the family, while I will be mainly responsible for taking care of the children and other housework.

Why do I imagine my future family in this way? Initially, this “fantasy” was derived from communication with my then partner. Because I did not like working, I was often worried about the need to choose a profession in the future. Unexpectedly, my partner was just the opposite. She dreamt of becoming a social worker, which would entail our spending a great deal of time apart. Our different ambitions for the future thus gave rise to my idea of “men inside, women outside”.

Nonetheless, another question arises. Why are there only very few people who hold this view? Why are some people unable to accept my idea? I think the strength of career ambition on the part of the man will influence men’s view about “men inside, women outside”. Since my career ambition is not strong, it has been easier for me to accept this idea.

What has caused my career ambition to be so weak? The influence of my family on me has been most profound. First of all, my family can satisfy me materially, leaving me with no worries about living. For example, some students have to do part-time jobs in order to help with the economy of the family, but my parents encourage me to concentrate on my studies instead. So far I have never truly experienced the kind of pressures which are typical of a capitalist society. Therefore, I am not very concerned with my future career development.

Moreover, my parents’ over-involvement in their work may have made me hate the idea of working. Although I understood that they were working hard for my good and for the good of the family, I still resented their neglect of me at that time. When I was at primary school, it was the Filipina maid who was responsible for the cooking at home, whereas my parents sometimes did not come home until midnight. One day my hand was injured when I was playing football at school, and it really hurt. I very much wished my mother would come home quickly and take me to the doctor. But she was very busy at the office and did not take me to the surgery until she got off work. Maybe it is because of such experiences as these that I have always wished to devote more time to my family instead of my future career.

## Profiles of Interviewees

Before engaging in case studies, I will first provide profiles of the interviewees. A profile is not a biography but an outline of a subject's life. Through the profile, we can obtain a preliminary insight into the interviewee's background, life-style, personal experiences, etc., and discover similarities in the life experiences of different interviewees. By comparing similarities and differences among the profiles of the interviewees, it is possible to roughly understand the impact of the interviewees' life experiences on them and find out how social factors are bound up with personal biography.

### Ka-chun: Flexible Gender Roles

Gender: Male	Age: 23	Partner: Wing-yan
Profession of father: Painter and decorator	Profession of mother: Housewife	Birth order <sup>2</sup> : 4/5

Ka-chun has four siblings. His relationship with other family members is so tenuous that they are more like roommates than kinsfolk. Ka-chun's father often works until the small hours and does not have much time to talk with him. At home, Ka-chun is on better terms with his two elder brothers, because they often play video games together.

Ka-chun claims to have been a bad boy in his childhood. He often hung about the streets, played video games and even committed theft once. As a result, his parents decided to move to Kowloon Tong, which was further away from town, in order that he would not have so many opportunities to wander the streets. After moving house, Ka-chun usually stayed at home to play video games, as a result of which he developed poor self-esteem. It was not until he went to secondary school that he began to make more friends through learning bridge.

Ka-chun has a more open attitude towards gender. Maybe because he is a Catholic, he is easy-going

and good-tempered and is willing to compromise on any matter. As a result of this kind of attitude, he has developed a flexible attitude to gender stereotypes and is able to play different gender roles according to different circumstances.

### Wing-yan: A Woman Who Longs to Become a Director

Gender: Female	Age: 22	Partner: Ka-chun
Profession of father: Painter and decorator	Profession of mother: Runs a florist's shop	Birth order: 1/2

Wing-yan's family background is relatively complicated. She used to have two younger sisters. But her second youngest sister was taken ill in early childhood. Her mother had quit her job in order to look after her, but the second youngest sister finally died. Wing-yan's ancestors had been very prosperous, but the present generation has fallen on hard times.

For her secondary and primary education, Wing-yan studied at prestigious schools and most of her classmates were from middle-class families. Most of her friends grew up in families with a professional background. For example, the father of one of her friends is a law professor and the mother is a lawyer. She has quite a few talented friends, one of whom has successfully run a dance school since her return from Germany. Another friend was awarded the "Ten Great Chinese Musicians" prize. In addition, all her friends speak English fluently. Generally speaking, Wing-yan's friends are all talented persons from well-to-do families.

As luck would have it, she got acquainted with a famous Hong Kong director and has had opportunities to write scripts. Through that director, Wing-yan has begun to know certain people from the more influential levels of society. After personally coming into contact with the movie world, she realized that "the waves behind drive those before", as the Chinese proverb goes, and that as soon as one slacks off, one's place will be taken by others.

After graduating from university, Wing-yan will plunge herself into the movie industry, hoping to do something big there.

<sup>2</sup> *alb*: *a*=the birth order of the interviewee, 1 representing the first born; *b*=the number of siblings including the interviewee

### Chi-wai: A Story of Growing Up in a Single-Parent Family

Gender: Male	Age: 21	Partner: Hiu-tong
Profession of father: No information available	Profession of mother: Garment sampling worker	Birth order: 2/3

Chi-wai grew up in a single-parent family. His father abandoned the family when Chi-wai was small, and his mother had to raise him and his two sisters single-handedly. Although his family is an incomplete one in other people's eyes, Chi-wai thinks that, as his mother has to be his father too, his family is still a satisfactory one and familial relations are harmonious. The absence of the father is not necessarily a loss for him.

Hiu-tong is Chi-wai's first love. They have been in love with each other for over a year. Chi-wai thinks that it is better to date someone after entering university, for then both parties are more mature and the relationship more stable. Even though both will be busy working after graduation and may not have much time to get together, Chi-wai is not worried that the relationship will turn cold. He thinks that human beings can adapt to changes in the environment and, through communication, overcome difficulties resulting from changes in their environment. Provided that both parties are willing to communicate and make allowances for the other party's thinking, a new relationship will be built enabling them to adapt to the new environment.

The experience of growing up in a one-parent family has made Chi-wai feel the mother-child connection to be relatively close. Because Chi-wai has not had a father to take care of him since childhood, he shares all his worries with his mother. As a result of these experiences, he attaches high importance to the mother-son relationship and believes that women do better than men as nurturers.

### Hiu-tong: A Childhood with Insufficient Parental Care

Gender: Female	Age: 22	Partner: Chi-wai
Profession of father: Herbalist	Profession of mother: Assistant manager	Birth order: 1/2

Hiu-tong's mother is a "superwoman", who has been focusing on her career ever since graduation. Her father began to learn Chinese medicine in his 30s and is now a herbalist. Because her parents had to work hard, Hiu-tong was looked after most of the time by her maternal grandmother when she was small and consequently lacked opportunities to communicate with her parents.

Maybe because of her childhood experience, Hiu-tong indicates that she may not have children after getting married. It is not that she does not like children, just that she thinks that social circumstances change so rapidly that she is not confident of being able to take good care of her children.

Moreover, she is dependent and she needs a sense of security, which mainly comes from her partner's economic support of their family. Although Hiu-tong declares that she can earn her living by working, she hopes that her partner can provide food and shelter, from which she can derive a sense of security. Influenced by this concept, it is very difficult for Hiu-tong to accept the idea of men staying at home to take care of the housework and kids.

### Ming-fai: A Typically Traditional Male

Gender: Male	Age: 21	Partner: Ka-yi
Profession of father: Newspaper vendor	Profession of mother: Works for a travel agency	Birth order: 2/2

Ming-fai's father is a newspaper vendor, whose working hours are from 2 or 3 p.m. to 2 or 3 a.m., so that he does not have much time to communicate with his family. Ming-fai would like his father to spend more time with him, but his father has to work for the family, and Ming-fai has no choice but to accept the *status quo*.

He does not have high career expectations. It was only by chance that he entered the department of accountancy at university, but that does not necessarily mean that he will work in the field of accountancy. Ming-fai's family economy is quite healthy. His parents are both working, and his 5-year-old brother has also started working, so Ming-fai is in no hurry to look for a job to

support the family. Nonetheless, Ming-fai thinks that work is the responsibility of men. Even though he does not attach much importance to career, he cannot accept the idea of men staying at home instead of working outside either.

Regarding division of labour by gender role, Ming-fai holds a more traditional view. Apart from accepting that “men take care of the external and women the internal”, he states that he will not share too much housework with his partner. Ming-fai thinks that tradition is a kind of moral standard laid down by public opinion; deviation from it will invite humiliation. Therefore, Ming-fai hopes his partner will stay at home to take care of their children when he is the family breadwinner.

**Ka-yi: A Woman Who Longs to Become an Accountant**

Gender: Female	Age: 21	Partner: Ming-fai
Father's profession: Plumber and electrician	Mother's profession: Part-time care-home volunteer	Birth order: 1/2

Ka-yi has attached importance to career since childhood, and her dream is to become a high-flying accountant. After leaving high school, she was admitted to a department of accountancy. Even before graduation, she has already been recruited by an accountancy firm. After graduation from the university, she will be trained to be a professional accountant. Therefore, Ka-yi will be busily engaged in her career after graduation. She states that being an accountant is a very busy career, which may even require overnight working during busy times.

When she was a child, her father often had to work in mainland China, as a result of which she lacked her father's care. She states that her father seldom does housework. But since he knows plumbing and electrical maintenance, all the repair work at home is undertaken by her father. Judging by her tone, Ka-yi does not regard maintenance and repair as housework.

Ka-yi knows how to play the piano, but she says that she does not like it. In the first place, her

mother made her learn the piano in order that she would have a skill from which she could make a living. So Ka-yi regards piano-playing as a job, learning the piano a kind of investment and playing the piano a skill that can earn income.

**Case Studies**

**Interviewees' Vision of Their Future**

In this section, I analyse the interviewees' views on career, family and the division of housework. It requires time to take care of both family and career, and conflicts will inevitably result. How are the interviewees going to resolve these conflicts? What do they think about housework division? Will gender influence their views on the above-mentioned issues?

**Career and Family**

Basically, all interviewees intend to work after graduation, but the two sexes have different reasons for deciding to do so. The men's main consideration is economic. For example, both Ming-fai and Chi-wai indicate that a dual-earner family can earn more money to enable its members to live more comfortably and stably. No male interviewees show strong career ambition. They long to have a stable job for the sake of a nice family life. To them, career is the means to achieve a perfect family rather than an end in itself.

The women, on the other hand, want to work in order to succeed in their career. Ka-yi and Wing-yan are cases in point. Ka-yi is studying accountancy and has been recruited by an accounting firm even before graduation. She says that she had already begun to aspire to a great career as an accountant while still a child. By chance, Wing-yan has got acquainted with a well-known Hong Kong director, and she aims to become a famous director. To them, the sense of success derived from a career is the most important aim of pursuing a career, while money is a consideration of only secondary importance. Another reason leading the interviewees to go out to work is that they abhor boredom and being out of touch with society. Hiu-tong says that her



career ambition is not strong, but she does not want to be a housewife, because housework is very boring, and it is very easy to become out of touch with the times when one is out of work. Even Ka-chun, who holds a more open attitude towards traditional gender roles, does not quite accept the mode of life in which one spouse works and the other stays at home, on the grounds that staying at home may mean losing touch with society.

The rise of the double-earner family is already a major trend. First of all, because of economic factors, the family can no longer be supported by one single person. It needs the joint efforts of both husband and wife. Secondly, the career ambition of women is growing stronger and even tends to surpass that of men. Lastly, the boredom of housework repels women so much that they all wish to find a job in order to escape the role of housewife. However, family members have to choose between career and family. All of the interviewees think that it is difficult to attach equal importance to family and career, with the exception of Ming-fai. He thinks that when both husband and wife go to work, the time available for taking care of children is bound to decrease. But he can make up in quality for the inadequacy in quantity. For example, the children's demands are met as far as possible. When the children wish the father to play with them, he will do so; when the children want to go to certain places for fun, they are taken there.

However, Ming-fai's idea may be just wishful thinking. What the children demand may be quantity instead of quality. According to Ruddick's (1992) labour theory of parenting, childcare needs practical action rather than just empty talk. Some fathers, declaring "I love my kids", may be willing to talk to their kids, but childcare needs time and physical effort. Even if the parents love their own children emotionally, they have to convert their thoughts to action before their children can feel their love. In addition, even satisfying the children in terms of quality takes time. When parents concentrate on their careers, they may be unable to spare even a little time to keep their children company. So I think the method proposed by Ming-fai cannot

effectively solve the problem of making time for the children.

Now that career and family cannot be given equal stress, how would the interviewees solve this dilemma? Ming-fai and Chi-wai wish their wives could stay at home to take care of the children. But they think the ultimate decision should be reached through negotiation. Ming-fai proposes to solve the problem by hiring a foreign domestic help. Though he is not very willing to delegate the care of his children to a maid, there is no alternative. Chi-wai, too, says he does not like hiring a domestic helper because he thinks that home is a private space which no outsider should be allowed to invade. His solution is to hand the children over to the care of one of their grandmothers.

Ka-yi and Hiu-tong indicate that when there is conflict between family and career, they will devote more time to the family. Ka-yi says she will attach more importance to career when she is young, but when approaching 30, she will put her career second in order to concentrate on the family. Nonetheless, she does not want to completely give up work, so she wishes to engage in a profession which will allow her to take care of the children at the same time (e.g., teaching piano). Hiu-tong chooses not to be too devoted to her career; she will work to rule, only do what absolutely has to be done, reduce her workload to the minimum and leave time for the family.

Wing-yan's and Ka-chun's ideas are very close to each other. Ka-chun thinks that the conflict between career and family is inevitable, so one spouse should concentrate on career and the other on family, but that does not necessarily mean "men outside, women inside". Wing-yan will find a partner who is not so career-minded in order to solve this conflict. They accept the traditional mode of division of labour with one spouse taking care of the outside, the other of the inside, deeming that this mode helps to reduce the contradiction between career and family. However, instead of following the traditional division of roles, they think that men do not necessarily have to give priority to career. Both parties may choose the living mode they prefer through negotiation.



deliberation. However, as pointed out by Berger and Berger (1975, p. 27), deliberation consumes time as well as mental energy, so people will only stop to deliberate when their life is disturbed. These disturbances may be certain incidents or accidents in personal experience or large-scale events encountered by the individual in society. Since the interviewees are in the same cohort, the large-scale social events encountered by them are more or less the same. I will therefore focus on an analysis of their life experiences and try to find out how those experiences influence the process by which they make choices.

### **Chi-wai and Hiu-tong: Interviewees Born into Nontraditional Families**

Chi-wai was very young when his father abandoned the family, and he grew up in a single-parent household. So his mother has had to assume the paternal role, too, taking care of the family economy while simultaneously providing emotional support. Even though his mother has provided for him and his two siblings single-handedly, he has missed out on having a paternal role model in the family. As a result, he can only learn how to play the role of a father from other sources.

To him, gender stereotyping is a means of learning to play the role of father. He points out that not knowing how to play a good father, he can only follow the traditional norm. However, he states clearly that this is not the only way out, that he can also accept his children's queries and that he will try to slowly adjust the way he plays the father. Nonetheless, not yet knowing how to play the role of father, he thinks that complying with tradition is a pretty good place to start from.

His partner Hiu-tong also grew up in a nontraditional family. When Hiu-tong was small, her parents had to go out to work and often could not look after her. At the initial stage of primary school, she lived with her maternal grandmother, because it was a more convenient arrangement for getting to school. Her mother went to her grandmother's place and checked her homework

only after finishing work. Then her mother would leave, without even dining with them. As a result, during her childhood, she envied her classmates for having both parents to take them to school and to pick them up after school and for having a mother to cook dinner for them. At that time, only Saturday and Sunday were her family days when she could rejoin her parents. Because she had few opportunities to meet her parents when she was a child, she is critical of them. Even now, after coming off work, her father and mother will still return to their own parents' places respectively for dinner so that Hiu-tong seldom has the opportunity to dine with her parents. Although their relations are not bad, this kind of family life is inadequate for her, as can be seen from the way they eat dinner.

Hiu-tong's "nontraditional" family is her regret, and she wishes to live in a more traditional family in the future. Her ideal family is one in which both husband and wife go out to work, but their work will not be very busy, so that they will have ample time to associate with their family members. She thinks it is most important for a couple to have time for each other. That may be the primal nature of traditional families—harmony and stability.

### **Wing-yan: An interviewee Born into an Aristocrat Family**

Wing-yan's father is a painter and decorator who has experienced two business failures, so he is regarded as a not very successful father; her mother runs a florist's shop. On the surface, this seems to be a very ordinary company, but her family turns out to have an aristocratic past and to have seen better days.

Her maternal grandfather was of mixed Japanese–Chinese ethnicity who came from a rich family. After graduating from the Medical Faculty of Peking University, he pursued further studies in Germany. Subsequently, he abandoned his studies and renounced his family fortune, in order to elope with his then partner to Hong Kong. And his partner's family had a communist background and enjoyed high status in China.

However, the family's fortunes began to decline when it came to her parents' generation. During her childhood, her family was impoverished and had to live in a humble wooden hut, which always leaked when it rained. And it was difficult for them to pay the medical fees when someone in the family was sick. In a museum exhibition, she saw a painting which had once hung in her home and which was painted by one of her family members. These experiences have made her understand the importance of money and stimulated her career ambition. She feels that when someone is unsuccessful in their career, it may be because "You are not hungry enough". Childhood hardships have driven Wing-yan to crave success in her career so that she may earn enough money to enjoy a comfortable life.

The sense of being on a mission to revive her family fortunes has influenced her to a certain extent. Because her aristocratic family had gone into decline a generation ago, her parents subjected her to strict control, hoping that she would become a successful person and restore the family to its original status. Under the influence of her parents, she hopes to contribute to rescuing her family from its current state of decline. She thinks that she has a talent for moviemaking. Coincidentally, right now in the movie industry, there are not enough trained younger women and men ready to take over from older experts. She thinks that her dream of becoming a great director is not unrealistic, and she is willing to try her luck in the film industry.

The experiences of the last generation have also influenced her views on love and career. Her grandfather had an extramarital affair which made her grandmother very unhappy for a long time. The problems of the older generation have disturbed her and made her understand that love may make her suffer, and so she prefers to attach more importance to career.

Being the eldest daughter, she has to undertake the responsibility of providing for the family. Because her father is going to retire in a couple of years' time, she has to be the economic provider of the family. The school fees of her younger sister are the problem that worries her most. Her sister is a form-one student of good

character and considerable academic ability. She wishes her sister could study abroad, which will, however, cost a lot. This obliges Wing-yan to seek career success in order to meet the economic demands of her family.

From this we can see that Wing-yan's career ambition is to a large extent derived from her family experiences. As she gives priority to career, the traditional family model does not suit her. In this way, she needs to think further about how her needs will be met by the way she chooses to raise her own family.

### **Ka-chun: An Interviewee Willing to Defer to Other People**

While Wing-yan gives priority to career and is unwilling to make significant changes for the sake of her family or her partner, her boyfriend, Ka-chun, is willing to compromise.

Ka-chun is able to see through gender stereotypes and adapt himself to different family modes. Thus, he can comply well with tradition as well as be very innovative, depending on the orientation of his partner. Some people think that he does not know his own mind, but Ka-chun thinks that this is a sign of respect for others. Ka-chun is a Catholic; out of Christian love, he is willing to help people, respect people and listen to people. In addition, he thinks that the most important thing in a relationship is mutual love; problems may be solved via mutual compromise.

Ka-chun has a rather novel view of sex roles, too. He thinks that depending on different circumstances, he can be very masculine, very feminine and even genderless. He indicates that being genderless is sometimes an advantage. For example, whereas people in general are deeply influenced by gender dichotomy, if a counsellor can transcend gender limitation, it will be good for his or her work. Another example: quite often when a man tells his partner that he is going to meet a friend, she will ask, "Is it a man or a woman?" Ka-chun thinks that this question is in fact neither here nor there, for a friend is someone you can have a talk with, and gender is irrelevant.

Ka-chun has not held these ideas about gender relations since childhood. After the Hong Kong School Certificate Examination, Ka-chun felt very empty at home, and he asked a social worker whether there was anything worthwhile that he could do. The social worker recommended that he read more books, and he then read quite a few books about philosophy and the two sexes. His views on gender are to a large extent derived from the work of a famous Hong Kong psychologist.

Ka-chun and Wing-yan are willing to free themselves from the gender division of labour. Chi-wai and Hiu-tong yearn for a traditional family. The two couples have different expectations. I used to think that people who choose a traditional family are just blindly following the social norm, but Chi-wai and Hiu-tong's stories have made me change my mind. I used to think that gender division of labour is a shackle, but Chi-wai takes this as a model, and Hiu-tong states outright that without a traditional family life, she will feel regretful, and so she looks forward to living in a traditional family. Instead of blindly accepting the gender division of labour of the traditional family, they choose a traditional family according to their own needs. It is not important what kind of mode of living we choose; what is important is that we know our right to choose, instead of blindly accepting certain values or modes of living. But how do we come to know our right to choose? How do we make choices?

### Relations Between Repression, Conflict and Insight

According to Berger and Kellner (1986), the individual has to first experience repression, and then obtain insight, and finally gain liberation (see Diagram 34.4).

We often unconsciously take our situation or environment for granted, just as a fish in a fish tank cannot feel the existence of water in it. By the same token, it is not easy for someone who

lives in a wealthy family to understand the importance of money; neither will someone taken good care of by their parents be able to imagine how it feels to lack parental care. As the Chinese saying goes, "They live in plenty without appreciating it".

According to Berger and Berger (1975), we will stop and reflect when we experience a mishap. For example, when the father of a prodigal son suddenly goes bankrupt, the son will not be able to remain a spendthrift as before. His father's sudden bankruptcy is a kind of restriction to him, depriving him of the freedom to squander as before. But this incident may also make the prodigal son reflect upon his past life, understand the importance of diligence, work hard and derive satisfaction from a career. In this way, although the pressure due to the change in the family environment has deprived him of his previous freedom, this change also gives rise to new thoughts in him so that he will eventually obtain happiness from another mode of living.

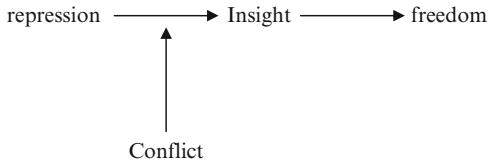
Wing-yan's childhood experience is an obvious example. Straitened family circumstances have made her understand the importance of money and focus on career development. However, through socialization, society instills into our minds an awareness of the behaviour that is expected of us according to our role (Berger and Kellner 1986). Women should attach importance to family rather than career. These social norms are a kind of repression of the individual. Wing-yan attaches importance to career, but society requires her to attach importance to family, and so conflict arises between the two. Only by solving this conflict can she liberate herself from the traditional role.

Chi-wai and Hiu-tong have also encountered another kind of repression: the pressure that comes from being born into a nontraditional family. Chi-wai was born into a single-parent family. He has lacked paternal care and, therefore, a role model. Although Hiu-tong grew up in an integrated family, she felt ignored because her parents focused on work and neglected her. These experiences are also repression to them, denying them the right to choose certain modes of living, while at the same time driving them to

repression → insight → liberation

**Diagram 34.4** Liberation from repression





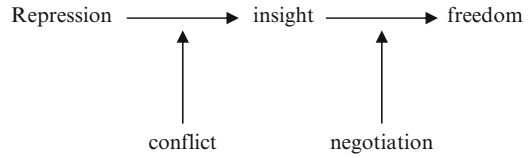
**Diagram 34.5** Liberation from repression (with conflict added)

imagine the perfect family they want to have in the future.

To the formula of Berger and Kellner (1986), we may add this element of conflict (see Diagram 34.5). When we are repressed, conflict may arise. We may decide between different choices. We may choose to compromise and continue to be repressed, but we may also attempt to make new choices.

However, in respect of family-role division of labour, the individual cannot decide alone; various kinds of difficulties have to be solved through negotiation with the partner. Even if the individual derives insight from repression and comes up with a new family model, the partner's cooperation is needed in order to achieve liberation from gender stereotypes. Ka-yi is a case in point. She likes to work, while Ming-fai hopes she will stay at home and look after any children they have. In order to resolve this conflict, Ka-yi chooses to concentrate on career development when she is young and reserves time for family later. Therefore, Ka-yi cannot break through the traditional gender stereotypes; she even reinforces the concept of "men outside, women inside". Nonetheless, she is not totally subject to the control of social norms. Through teaching piano at home, she can alleviate the contradiction between career and family. Although she cannot completely liberate herself from gender stereotypes, she can still obtain a certain degree of freedom through choosing her own mode of living.

Wai-chi and Hiu-tong also have a similar situation. Both of them intend to continue working after getting married, but Hiu-tong is willing to compromise when their child is born, for it will need to be taken care of. Therefore, they are unable to free themselves from the concept of "men outside, women inside". However, both of them attach importance to family. This mode



**Diagram 34.6** Liberation from repression (with conflict and negotiation added)

of living is not necessarily a shackle to them. On the contrary, "men outside, women inside" may even liberate them from childhood repression.

Among the respondents, only Wing-yan manages to liberate herself through negotiation with Ka-chun. Her ideal family is one in which she takes care of the economy of the family while Ka-chun stays at home, but Ka-chun does not intend to be a full-time "house husband". As a result, a certain conflict exists between them. Nonetheless, through negotiation, they find a strategy acceptable to both parties—both go out to work with Wing-yan giving priority to work and Ka-chun to family. In this way, Wing-yan may manage to liberate herself from social repression.

To sum up, even if the interviewees obtain insight and intend to make new choices, they will not necessarily manage to liberate themselves from repression. This is because role division of labour, instead of being a personal choice, requires decisions on the part of both parties. They have to solve the conflict between them through negotiation and thereby liberate themselves from repression together (see Diagram 34.6).

## Re-examination of Social Determinism and Voluntarism

Let me first look at social determinism in terms of the two concepts of "man in society" and "society in man" put forth by Berger (1963) in *Invitation to Sociology*.

In "man in society", Berger points out that the individual is trapped in concentric circles; as individuals, we are shackled by countless norms. Family, significant others and social institutions, etc., give rise to pressure on us. As pointed out by Cuzzort and King (1976), these external social

controls can be divided into the following categories: violence (including the threat of violence), ridicule, fraud, ostracism, occupational control, sphere of intimates and systems of mutual obligation.

From the case studies of this chapter, it can be seen that some interviewees are really subject to external social control. For example, Ming-fai indicates that non-compliance with moral norms set by society will result in ridicule, for a man looking after children at home will be laughed at and even regarded as a sign of inadequacy and a father taking his children to and from school will be rejected by housewives doing the same thing.

However, the effect of external control lags far behind internal control. As pointed out by Cuzzort and King (1976), if the individual does not enact certain behaviour wholeheartedly, they may think of some way to escape. Therefore, society tries to control the individual's belief, so that they will willingly undertake the role assigned to them by society and cooperate with society to control their own behaviour. Through socialization, society internalizes external structures and makes them part of the individual. This kind of influence cannot be easily discerned by us, as a result of which our behaviour and thoughts are in fact unconsciously constrained by an invisible hand.

From among the interviewees, it is not difficult to discern how internalized society influences the individual's thoughts. Both Ka-yi and Hiu-tong indicate that when conflict emerges between career and family, they are willing to make adjustments. This exactly reflects the fact that the concept of "men outside and women inside" still plays an important part in their mind. Consequently, they are unable to question the gender inequality implied by this thought.

The above-mentioned views together constitute social determinism. This kind of theory regards people as completely passive puppets and society as a system for dominating the individual. This kind of theory, however, cannot explain why there are deviants in society. Quite a few scholars have vigorously criticized social determinism. Wrong (1961) points out that although everybody has to go through the process of socialization, the

individual is not wholly moulded by norms and values in their culture. George Herbert Mead also points out that although society precedes the individual, no social force, no matter how powerful it is, can wholly control the individual, provided that people realize that they are independent entities (Cuzzort and King 1976).

Therefore, apart from social determinism, voluntarism has emerged. Voluntarism regards the individual as a free social animal and objects to regarding human beings as passive puppets. Berger (1963) points out that many people take society for granted and think that they themselves do not have any choice. Berger, however, points out that people say "I don't have a choice" out of "bad faith", because people are able to say no to society. He goes on to say that the possibility of emergence of bad faith precisely illustrates the idea that people can be free. The reason why people can harbour bad faith is that they are not willing to face the freedom that they possess (Berger 1963, p. 143).

Some people may consider whether to say no from a moral perspective, but Brandt (1981), adopting the point of view of Manuel J. Smith in *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*, points out that when we are considering whether to say no, we should detach ourselves from moral considerations, because so-called morality is actually social codes used by other people to control us. For example, parents may control our behaviour via praise or disapproval of us. However, Smith points out that "correct" and "wrong" are relative concepts, and that there are in fact no absolutely "correct" moral ways that people must comply with. By saying no, we can choose to disobey social codes and thus escape from the control of society and gain freedom.

Berger (1963) also points out that people may regard society as drama in which the individual can adopt different strategies to play their own role. He proposes three role-playing strategies: transformation, detachment and manipulation.

Transformation refers to the individual redefining the proper behaviour of his or her own role and acting in a way different from that expected by the old definition. For example, a master expects his slave to bow to him,

but the slave gives him a blow instead (Berger 1963, p. 129).

If we cannot change society, we may choose to detach ourselves from it. One way of detaching ourselves is to build up our own subculture or “subworld” as proposed by Berger. The subworld is like an isolated island in the sea, far away from busy cities. Within the subworld, we can have our own language and culture which are not subject to the influence of society. For example, homosexuals and drug addicts construct their own culture in order to escape from the society of other people. Detachment has a milder form—when one is wrapped up in one’s interests, one may ignore society’s demands. For instance, when mathematicians are devoted to their studies, they do not have to be concerned with social affairs, provided that their basic living requirements can be met. In other words, one may revel in one’s own small universe. To sum up, detachment is to construct a subworld comprising the individual or a group, in order to escape from the society to which one belongs (Berger 1963, p. 133). Take family for example. A detached person may choose not to accept the traditional family system. They may negate the traditional marital system by choosing either to remain single or to cohabit with their partner.

Manipulation means to work the system in a new way, to exploit the social system by unexpected means in order to reach a certain target. For example, prisoners in the laundry section use the washing machine in their work place to wash their own socks, or soldiers use military vehicles to pick up their girlfriends (Berger 1963). In addition, “role distance” is also an effective means to avoid being completely controlled by one’s social role. Role distance means playing one’s role not entirely according to its requirements but with some ulterior motive. For example, a servant or slave may treat their master in a way that accords with their role but at the same time plan to cut the latter’s throat. In other words, the inner distance between consciousness and action in playing a role is role distance (Berger 1963).

The difference between manipulation and transformation lies in the fact that the former does

not redefine the expectations of a role, that the manipulator as an individual just contrives a new means to exploit the social system. In this research, there are also interviewees who make use of the above-mentioned strategies to resist social structure. The work-to-rule strategy of Hiu-tong is an approach which releases more time for the family by way of role distance, without prejudice to proper staff duties.

Although Berger and Kellner (1986) point out that it is possible for everyone to move towards freedom, they cannot explain why some people can realize their own freedom while some others adhere to convention. As can be seen from the formulae of their liberation from repression, insight is very important in the journey to freedom. Thus, I try to find out factors which can trigger off insight. Through comparing my own experiences with those of the interviewees, I discover that some factors are especially important for triggering insight, for example, family. If the influence of social structure on the individual is really so profound, we have to query the possibility of voluntarism.

Quite a few sociologists try to combine social determinism and voluntarism and strike a balance in between. The structuration theory of Giddens (1984) tries to resolve the conflict between social structure and human agency. He objects to dichotomizing society and the individual and advocates paying attention to the duality of and dialectical relationship between society and the individual. Ritzer and Goodman (2004) say that society and the individual are two sides of the same coin—inseparable from each other. To Giddens, structure is always both constraining and enabling. Social structure restricts our freedom, but as posited by Berger and Kellner (1986), the repression exerted on us by these constrictions is also the source of our insight.

Bourdieu puts forth the concept of habitus to resolve the conflict between social determinism and voluntarism. According to the interpretation of Ritzer and Goodman (2004), habitus is social structure internalized in the mind. As pointed out by Turner (2003), people belonging to the same class tend to have similar habituses. These habituses will provide the individual with cognitive

and emotional guidelines of behaviour. For example, people of different classes will have different tastes and different ways of dressing and speaking. Therefore, these habituses will restrict our thoughts and actions.

As found by this research, family background may be internalized as personal habitus, restricting the choices of the individual. However, Myles, Ritzer and Goodman (2004) point out that although habitus restricts the thoughts and choices of the individual, constriction and determinism must not be confused with each other. Instead of making decisions for us, habitus only suggests how people should think and act. Thus, the individual's thoughts and actions are not solely constructed by social structure; people are able to choose their own actions.

Berger and Kellner (1986) point out that the concept of freedom can be transformed into the concept of option. According to Berger, through sociological analysis, it can be found that the choices of the master are apparently more numerous than those of the slave, and it can then be concluded that the master is freer than the slave. Nonetheless, it is not true that the slave has no choice at all, just that their choices are fewer than their master's under normal circumstances. On the surface, the slave's body is constrained, and they can only be free in their mind. However, under certain circumstances, the slave may have more choices than the master. When the master is fast asleep, the slave may choose to kill him. Thus, through choosing their own action, the slave may also obtain certain freedom.

Now let me try to integrate the two extreme theories of social determinism and voluntarism in order to sum up my research. From the point view of social determinism, social environment really restricts our actions and thoughts. Traditional gender stereotypes are still the yoke in the mind of everybody. Every one, women and men alike, is unconsciously under the influence of this concept, the only difference being the degree of influence. For example, Chi-wai indicates that he is willing to do housework but he is unwilling to change nappies for the baby. Men may indicate their willingness to undertake housework, but they may only choose easier tasks.

However, the individual will not completely passively receive what society instils either. Take Chi-wai's case for example. Although he chooses to accept the traditional mode of housework division, he has repeatedly indicated that this mode may be adjusted through intra-couple communication. It can thus be seen that he "chooses" the living mode he wishes to follow instead of blindly resigning himself to societal control.

Applying the concept of option, we can try to re-examine the relations between social structure and individual initiative. On the one hand, social structure limits our choices. For example, people who have grown up in a single-parent family have choices different from those of people who have grown up in a complete family. Chi-wai's family lacks the paternal role model, as a result of which his potential choices are different from those of people who have grown up in a complete family. Nonetheless, the lack of a father does not mean that he has fewer choices than other people. On the contrary, this experience may make him acquire a discerning power that others do not possess and thus more options. Although social structure restricts what choices the individual can have, it is the individual that makes the final decision. We choose between a number of options in order to solve conflicts. This is the power of the individuals expressing their initiative.

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## Conclusion

Maybe social factors play a role in my wish to live in a family of "men inside and women outside". My family and partner no doubt influence my image of my future family. However, I will not completely attribute my imagination to social circumstances. One of my characteristics is the love of thinking, and the questions that arise when I think are always trivial questions in ordinary people's eyes. For example, when I was a child, I always asked questions like, "Why should we make New Year visits?" and "Why must we revere our teachers?" I believe many parents' responses are, "This is a traditional custom", "If you don't pay New Year calls, relatives will think that you are not being polite" and "Your teachers

are more knowledgeable than you are, so you have to obey them". Children may, however, say, "Daddy forces me to pay New Year calls and I have no choice" or "If I don't listen to my teachers, they will punish me", etc. Nonetheless, asking these questions, which seems to be common, is in fact the first step towards debunking. Through continuous asking and answering, the social masks of society will be removed, and we will see the realities hidden underneath.

Berger (1963, p. 38) gives a few examples to illustrate that sociology has the function of debunking. One of the topics of Max Weber's sociology is unintended consequences generated by personal action. He attempts to find out the connection between protestant ethics and the rise of capitalism (Weber 1930). It is noteworthy that the protestant ethic was not established for the benefit of the capitalist system; the rise of capitalism is just an unintended consequence of the protestant ethic. Weber tries to find the relationship involved.

In studying suicide, Emile Durkheim (1952) found that suicide, an action seemingly determined by personal motive, is in reality influenced by social circumstances.

The contemporary sociologist, Robert Merton (1968), has proposed the concepts of manifest function and latent function, implying that sociology has the function of debunking, that we need to consider the latent function of a thing or an event quite separately from its manifest function. Moreover, from the concept of ideology, we can also see the debunking tendency of sociology. Ideology rationalizes the interests of a group, but this would distort social facts. When people explain their action with ideology, sociology may regard it as self-deception. Through the examples given by Berger, we can see that the nature of sociology is to expose truths. It is only because I have this spirit of debunking falsities that I have been able to see through the myths of tradition and find new exits.

My possession of a sociological spirit may be attributed to the social environment, but if the question is to be pursued further, it may be unanswerable just like "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Nonetheless, I still believe that the individual's power is larger than the power of

social structures. I am too optimistic to accept social determinism. I choose to believe that I have the strength to resist society, and it is precisely this belief that drives me to do my best.

The individual's strength looks small, but solidarity is power. When the strength of the many is gathered, it will be enough to resist society. Let me illustrate with what Babbie (1988) says, referring to the black movement, how the strength of the masses may change the structure of a society.

On 1 December 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, took the bus home after work. According to the rule at that time, black passengers had to sit at the back of the bus. As it was rush hour, all the seats reserved for whites were occupied. The bus driver then ordered the passengers in the front row of the black section of the bus to surrender their seats to white passengers in accordance with the unwritten rule of that time. But Mrs. Parks refused to surrender her seat and was put in jail as a consequence.

This story might have ended here. However, many local black pastors, deeming that Mrs. Parks had been subject to inhuman treatment, initiated protests. They invited Martin Luther King to lead a campaign to boycott public vehicles. The blacks were now organized. Car owners helped by giving lifts to other people. Some chose to go to work on foot; some chose to ride a bicycle. Initially, they only intended to carry out a symbolic boycott for one day, but the boycott went on. The police then began to arrest the black people on the streets. Many blacks, including Martin Luther King, were assaulted and put in prison. But the boycott continued.

As a result, their boycott aroused attention all across the southern United States and even won the support of the whole world. Eventually, on 13 November 1956, the United States Supreme Court declared that racial segregation in public facilities violated the Constitution. This racial revolution originated from the action of a single person—Parks—but her individual action woke up other black people and incited them to take part in the campaign against society, as a result of which the cause of racial equality made a giant leap forward.



From that it can be seen that social transformation comes from individual transformation. Babbie (1988) points out that the system created by us basically will not change of its own accord. Only people can make it change. This kind of action is usually initiated by one single person, just like Mrs. Parks' refusal to surrender her seat to a white bus rider. The question is: Who will come forth and be the pioneer?

As aptly expressed by Mills (1970, pp. 192–193), sociologists' interest in social structures is not based upon the viewpoint that structure determines the future. We study restrictions imposed by the structures on individual decisions in order to find points of effective intervention. This enables us to understand what changes we can and need to make to the structures, so that we can acquire more decision-making power. Through comprehending the operation of social structures, we can find ways to control it. In this study, I try to find out structural factors restricting personal choices. But I do not aim at pointing out how strong the social structures are. On the contrary, when we understand how social structures construct personal choices, we can gain discernment through imagining ourselves situated in different social circumstances and thus have more options.

I believe that initially people created social structures not for the sake of restricting personal freedom but for facilitating societal operations. We routinize behaviours that often appear in society so that they become social norms followed by people. Without these norms, we will have to redefine all rules every time we meet others. Living in this kind of society may be very exciting but it will also be very difficult (Berger and Kellner 1986). From this it can be seen that social structures provide rules for people so that we may live more easily. However, if we blindly follow these rules, we will become inflexible and our lives will become boring, losing the original intention of the rules. As the English proverb goes, "If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun". In addition, although rules restrict our actions, these rules can be modified by us as they are man-made after all. As Berger says (1963, p. 129), "Society defines us, but it is in turn defined by us".

Sociology has greatly enlightened me. I therefore hope to bring more people to a knowledge of sociology so that they may discover their own restraints, find the point of breakthrough and become our comrades in combating society. The reason why sociological knowledge cannot be widespread in society may be because sociological writings are usually too abstruse and boring. For many reasons, sociologists may be unable to write articles in their own preferred style. For example, in order to increase the chances of publication in academic journals, and thus the chance of promotion, they have to write articles in keeping with a certain format. However, this format not only restricts the potential of sociologists but also confines sociological writings to a professional realm which the public can hardly access (Becker 1982; Richardson 1979). But I believe that provided that sociologists are willing to try hard, sociology can become a discipline that laymen are able to comprehend. As a student of sociology, I also hope this chapter will bring more people into contact with sociology and help them to know something about the domain. This is my wish.

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# Hong Kong Lesbian Partners in the Making of Their Own Families

35

Day Wong

Family has long been defined in accordance with the biological model. It is commonly believed that the biology of reproduction “naturally” produces the family. The heterosexual, nuclear family pattern is often taken for granted as the norm. In Hong Kong, figures from population censuses reveal that the nuclear family not only remains the predominant form of domestic households but is also continuously on the rise in the past few decades. In 2006, the nuclear family constituted 67% of all domestic households, in comparison with 54.4% in 1981.<sup>1</sup> However, paradoxically, other increasing trends, such as those of divorce and remarriage rates, single-parent families, blended families or stepfamilies, childless couples, spinsterhood, and split families associated with cross-border marriages, all point toward the inadequacy of using the conventional nuclear family pattern as a universalistic model. From 1981 to 2006, the number of divorce decrees granted increased rapidly from 2,060 to 17,424.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, remarriages of either

party or both parties increased significantly and constituted 33.6% of all marriages in 2006, as compared with 4.3% in 1981.<sup>3</sup> Cross-border marriages account for more than two-fifths of the total number of marriages registered in Hong Kong.<sup>4</sup> An increased prevalence of spinsterhood across all age groups is also witnessed. Specifically, for the age group 40–44, the percentage of never married women reached 16% in 2006, as compared with 3% in 1981.<sup>5</sup> Figures also show that an increasing proportion of women remain childless at the end of their reproductive span. About 9.3% of women born in 1951 never had any children, but the corresponding percentage increases to 22.3% for those born in 1961.<sup>6</sup> What do all of these trends as well as the concomitant prevalence of the nuclear family tell us about the challenges that our families face?

In a study of social development indicators in Hong Kong, Lee and Lu (1997) found that people in Hong Kong are becoming more liberal in their sexual attitudes and more tolerant of divorce, premarital and extramarital sex, and homosexuality. They begin to see divorce as a solution in cases of infidelity, maltreatment of

<sup>1</sup> See Hong Kong 1991 Population Census, main report, p. 58 for the 1981 figure and the 2006 Population By-Census—Summary Results, p. 60 for the 2006 figure.

<sup>2</sup> Demographic Trends in Hong Kong 1981–2006, p.66. The general divorce rates (the number of divorce decrees granted during a given year per 1,000 midyear population aged 15 and over of that year) increased from 0.53% to 2.94% (p. 67).

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<sup>3</sup> Demographic Trends in Hong Kong 1981–2006, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Out of the 50,328 marriages registered in 2006, 21,588 marriages were cross-border marriages, with 18,182 cases where the brides were from the mainland and 6,483 cases where the bridegrooms were from the mainland (Demographic Trends in Hong Kong 1981–2006, p. 69).

<sup>5</sup> Demographic Trends in Hong Kong 1981–2006, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Demographic Trends in Hong Kong 1981–2006, p. 32.

spouse, and failure to perform familial or marital duties. While aware that the idea of "the marriage institution is in crisis" is an exaggeration, Lee and Lu nevertheless concluded that the trends signify the decline of the marriage institution. To cast doubt on this conclusion, Shae and Ho (2001) introduced Stacey's (1990) notion of the postmodern family to the local debate. Stacey (1990) argued that diverse and innovative family arrangements have emerged in American society whereby people satisfy their desire for intimacy and cope with an unsettling environment in the postmodern age. Shae and Ho (2001) defined the postmodern family as the family without a family structure or ideology and used a metaphor to describe the variegated patterns: "A person can develop a loving relation with A, have sex with B, have married to C, and cohabit with D. This person can bear or rear children with any of the above individuals or with other people. With the existing development of reproductive technology, the person can even bear children with people of the same sex" (Shae and Ho 2001, p. 100). Although the authors have not provided empirical studies to demonstrate the notion of a postmodern family, their discussion gives useful hints on integrating same-sex couples into our knowledge base, which is necessary for developing a better understanding of family trends and diversity.

In Hong Kong there is no evidence that non-conventional family forms will replace the nuclear family, yet they serve on the pioneer outpost of the postmodern family condition, declaring the collapse of a monolithic cultural regime that governs our imagination of family and practice of intimacy. If the model of the middle-class, heterosexual nuclear family, characterized by well-defined gender roles, is still upheld in modern capitalist society as a progressive form and central unit of social order, it should not blind us to the further transformations in social, cultural, economic, and political arrangements that take society beyond modernity. The transformation includes the existence of alternative family units, globalization of gay and lesbian identities, and legal recognition of same-sex unions. As pointed out by Ritzer

(1997, p. 8), modernity and postmodernity may not be understood as two epochs. Rather, they can be seen as engaged in a long running relationship with one another, with postmodernity continually pointing out the limitations of modernity.

I argue for the importance to attest to the different types of families that are currently being constructed and to the centrality and significance of these families in peoples' everyday lives. Specifically, I researched lesbians who actively created their own families, despite being shut out of wedlock in Hong Kong. My interest in this topic can be traced back to 2004 when I was involved in an oral history project titled "Hong Kong Women Who Love Women." In a meeting on the design of interview questions, some members, including myself, suggested that we should collect some basic information of the informants, such as their age, occupation, and family profile. A self-identified lesbian, the organizer of the Women Coalition of Hong Kong named Wai-wai said: "If you asked me about my family, I would say that I am living with Sai-sai (her partner) and my cat. That is my family." Her response alerted me to the problem of a widely held assumption that equates the family of a homosexual person to the family of origin. This assumption overlooks the fact that despite the lack of recourse to marriage in the making of their families, some lesbian couples claimed "we are family, too." As social constructionists have argued, our perception of reality is largely shaped by the subjective meaning that we give to an experience. The meaning strongly influences what we see and how we respond to situations. An informant said, "if something happened to her (my same-sex partner) and to my parents' family, I would rush to see her first." To these lesbian couples, their partners may mean more to them when compared with their blood kin, and the families that they form are in no ways less real than their blood families. I see that there is a need to push the intellectual frontiers of family diversity further by examining the experiences of same-sex couples, an area which is still lacking in local family studies.

## Same-Sex Couples: A Missing Part of Family Diversity

In light of continuously rising divorce rates in Hong Kong and the heightened concern for the decline of family, some local scholars have devoted efforts to promote greater awareness of the diversity of family forms. Cheung (1995, 2004), Wong (2004a), and Lau (2007) examined postdivorce families from the perspective of resilience rather than pathology. They argued that attention should be shifted away from the notion of deficiency to the processes of family dynamics and factors of social support. The rise of cross-border families adds to the diversity of family arrangements in Hong Kong. With an increase in the number of marriages between Hong Kong people and mainland residents and the immigration restriction which deprives mainland spouses of the right to abode in Hong Kong, not only do the mobile livelihoods and family strategies mark the distinction of these split families from conventional nuclear families (Leung and Lee 2005), but the ways that men take up household and child-caring activities also shed light on the traditional gender division of labor (Wong, W.L. 2004; Wong, D. 2004a,b; Choi 2008). The increasing trends of stepfamilies, single-parent families, and split families force us to rethink the idealized family model where children are living with their two biological parents.

Leung et al. (2003) questioned the assumption that the conventional nuclear family model should be strengthened and preserved. In the 1991 White Paper, "Social Welfare into the 1990s and Beyond," Leung et al. wrote, the Hong Kong Government maintains that "a family is a group of people of at least two generations related by blood and by marriage who may be living together as one household or separately, but keeping their kinship intact." Informed by feminist critiques of the sexual division of labor in the nuclear family, Leung et al. commented that such a definition often presupposes a family structure in which the family centers on a marriage between a man and a woman, with well-defined gender roles. The government's emphasis on the family as the

major source of care and support for children and other family members lends itself to a familial ideology that enables them to shift the welfare responsibility onto women. Scholars such as Ng (1995) and Lee (2002) have contributed to uncovering the double burden that working women suffer in conventional household arrangements.

While an awareness of the diversity of family forms begins to emerge, heterosexist assumptions continue to underlie common sense and even scholarly definitions of family.

The notions of being gay and family have been mutually exclusive concepts in public discourse. Groups which oppose same-sex marriage or legal protection of homosexuals often call themselves "pro-family." In family studies, sexual orientation is often ignored and limited research has been accumulated to date about lesbian and gay families. Feminist sociology has provided a profound critique of mainstream sociology. Yet in the process of rewriting mainstream sociology, feminist sociology easily falls into participating in the heterosexual imagery. The critiques on the unequal sexual division of labor may reveal an implicit perpetuation of a normative heterosexuality. Not only is there a marginalization of lesbian and gay knowledge from sociological inquiries, the ways in which heteronormative assumptions organize many conceptual and professional practices are seldom called into question. For example, many social science surveys ask respondents to check off their marital status as married, divorced, separated, widowed, or single. All respondents are invited to identify themselves according to their participation in marriage or heterosexuality, regardless of their sexual affiliation (Ingraham 1994).

Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith warned us against the enactment of modes of ruling in sociology. Her insights can be employed to interrogate not only the male-dominated conceptual practice of sociology but also the heterocentrism of family studies (Ingraham 1994). In the first edition of the anthology *Normal Family Processes*, published in 1982 in the United States, the subject of lesbian and gay families was ignored. It was in the 1993 edition that Laird's chapter "Lesbian and Gay Families" was included



(Stacey 1996, p. 130). A systematic review of the three leading journals, namely, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *Journal of Family Issues*, and *Family Relations*, shows that among the 2,598 articles published during 1980–1993, only 12 articles focused explicitly on families of lesbians and gay men (Allen and Demo 1995). In Hong Kong, local scholars have begun to devote effort to promoting family diversity, but gay and lesbian families are treated as nonexistent and left unaddressed. Their speechlessness, inauthenticity, and invisibility mark the institutional oppression that they face in our society.

This chapter adopts the theoretical approach of social constructionism in the study of families. Social constructionism considers knowledge and meaning to be shaped by culturally shared assumptions. It drew on developments in several disciplines including social interactionism, labeling theory, cross-cultural studies, and gender studies (Vance 1995). Social construction theory can be traced to a classic work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality*, which explains the processes by which anybody of “knowledge” comes to be socially accepted as reality. Reality does not exist as a world out there. Rather, people continuously create, through their actions and interactions, a shared reality that is experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful. In this light, family as a concept or practice is the construct or artifact of a group of people. It is a human product rather than manifestation of any inherent and transhistorical essences. Since the 1980s, inspired by the work of Michel Foucault (1976), constructionist sociologists have undergone a discursive turn and focused on (re)negotiation and contestation of meanings. Foucault’s (1976) analysis of the modern invention of the homosexual identity showed how gay activists reappropriated the medical discourse which portrays homosexuals as inborn and sick to demand legal protection. In recent decades, gay activism has centered at the demand for legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Family has been opened up as a new area of contestation and disagreement.

Heated debates on the definition of the family were stirred up in Hong Kong when the

government proposed to reform the domestic violence law in 2007. The proposed amendments allowed victims of abuse by relatives, cohabiting partners, former spouses, and former cohabiting partners, not just spouses, to seek court-ordered injunctions. Pro-gay activists argued that protection should be extended to same-sex couples who are cohabiting. To support the claim, Women Coalition of Hong Kong conducted a survey to gauge the prevalence of abuse in female same-sex relationships. It was found that 16% of the respondents had been physically abused by their partners. However, the proposal to include same-sex relationships in the ordinance had met strong opposition from some religious groups and antihomosexual camps, which insist that heterosexual marriage or its associated relationships are the definitive feature of family. As the law’s Chinese name was translated as “family violence,” opponents argued, the inclusion of same-sex relationships in the ordinance would give tacit recognition to same-sex marriage. In order to clear the fears that the law might recognize same-sex marriage, the government has finally decided to rename the “Domestic Violence Ordinance” as the “Domestic and Cohabiting Relationships Violence Ordinance.” Same-sex partners are to be protected under the category of cohabiting relationships, the government maintains, which should not be confused with the categories of “marriage,” “spouse,” and “family.”

Despite the failure to obtain social and legal recognition of their intimate relationships, same-sex partners display agency and creativity in constructing ways of life that are valid to them. Berger and Luckmann (1966) saw the relationships between structure and agency as a dialectical one. Society forms the individuals who create society. The dialectical process contains a moment of objectivation, whereby individuals apprehend everyday life as an ordered, prearranged reality that imposes itself upon them. Yet, in the moment of externalization, individuals create their social worlds by their own human activity. This means that human beings not only recreate social institutions by their ongoing externalization of them,

they can also create a new social reality. The creation of same-sex families despite the lack of public recognition can be seen as an example of externalization. Giddens (1979, 1981) describes human action as essentially transformative. That is, human action involves intervention in events in the world, thus producing certain definite outcomes. However, instead of endorsing voluntarism, Giddens (1979, 1981) emphasizes the mutual dependence of structure and agency. He argues for the duality of structure, where social structure is both the medium and the outcome of social action. Structure, for Giddens (1979, 1981), refers to semantic rules in the signification system, moral rules in the legitimation system, and unequally distributed resources in the domination system. Actors draw upon various rules and resources, including symbols in communication, economic resources, and legal rules, in social interaction to achieve outcomes.

This study explores the meaning-making processes of Hong Kong lesbian couples who consider themselves family. For heterosexual couples, children are often seen as the pivot of their family lives. However, for lesbian couples in Hong Kong, forming a family is not so much an indication that they plan to have children. My informant Cecilia's response is typical. "Heterosexual couples can bear children; same-sex partners can adopt children. But I haven't thought about adoption. For we don't have the financial ability, nor is adoption allowed for same-sex couples in Hong Kong." They are well aware of the constraining circumstances. Similar to other Hong Kong people, same-sex couples worry about the considerable costs of raising a child, particularly the financial strain that it places on the family budget. If their family life does not center upon children, what are the unique narratives that lesbian couples construct to give meaning to their family lives? During the 1980s, a "lesbaby boom" was witnessed in the West, when lesbians joined the burgeoning ranks of women actively choosing to have children outside of marriage (cf. Weston 1991; Stacey 1996). Nelson (2001) explored the process whereby lesbian couples in Canada come to identify themselves as families and discovered a diversity of

patterns among them. Some donor-inseminated lesbian mothers perceived the birth of a child as the key for the transition from a couple to a family; others perceived that the transition took a longer time and it was from sharing the child-rearing responsibilities that made them a family. In Hong Kong, what makes lesbian partners think of themselves as family?

I argue that Hong Kong lesbian couples are active agents who employ various rules and resources in constructing a new social reality—same-sex families—for themselves. They borrow and even go beyond the symbolic rules of the heterosexual relationship for affirmation and celebration of their commitment to each other. They organize their familial relationships around the rules of providing care and integrating with families of origin. It is through these practices that Hong Kong lesbians articulate and experience their same-sex relationship as family. As this study shows, despite denial of access to marriage to same-sex partners, these lesbian couples are resourceful and knowledgeable actors capable of overcoming the constraints of a heteronormative society and building families of their own.

My sample, which was one of convenience, consisted of 10 women. All were in committed relationships with women at the time of the interview in 2006. Stating that my research was about lesbians creating their own families, I recruited lesbians who identify their partners as family members as my informants. The age range was from 28 to 59, and their stories were reflective of diverse sociohistorical contexts (see Table 35.1 for characteristics of the informants). It is worth noting that these lesbian couples are not a homogeneous group who share identical experiences. Rather, they negotiate and articulate the meaning of family in different ways, depending on the repertoire of available narratives and the dominant social discourses in the larger surrounding. Drawing on my informants' accounts of their family relationships, I would like to highlight the three major axes along which they define their same-sex relationship as family, namely, affirming commitment, providing care, and integrating with families of origin.

**Table 35.1** Characteristics of informants

	Age	Education	Length of the current relationship
Delaney	59	Secondary school	About 20 years
Malinda	44	Tertiary education	8 years
Selina	39	Tertiary education	6 years
Kody	37	Secondary school	14 years
Dilys	36	Secondary school	Over 10 years
Spencer	35	Secondary school	5 years
Nicole	35	Secondary school	4 years
Blake	35	Tertiary education	12 years
Gigi	32	Tertiary education	2 years
Rita	28	Secondary school	1–2 years

## Expressing Commitment

Denmark was the first country to implement the registered partnership law in 1989. In the decade and half that followed, 15 additional Western European countries passed a similar legislation. In 2001, the law allowing same-sex couples to marry came into force in Holland, together with a new law allowing same-sex couples to adopt children. Belgium and Ontario in Canada followed suit in 2003. Same-sex unions owe their globalization to the dissemination of the idea that marriage is a basic human right rather than a cultural choice. Transnational advocacy networks, which include not only LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) organizations but also mainstream human rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have developed to convince policymakers that marriage is a human right that all democratic states must uphold (Kollman 2007).

As a result of the intense mobility of people, commodities, images, and ideologies, the globalized discourse of human rights can be found in the rhetoric of local groups (Dennis Altman 1996). In Hong Kong, since the decriminalization of homosexual acts in 1991, pro-gay rights organizations have devoted much effort to fighting for antidiscrimination legislation, equal protection of the law, and partnership rights (Wong 2004b). In 2001, local gay activist Roddy Shaw and his partner Nelson Ng joined in a civil union in Vermont, the only state that gives full legal marital rights to

same-sex couples in the United States. The step that they took for demanding recognition of the same-sex union was through an application to the Inland Revenue Department in Hong Kong for tax consideration of spousal deduction. The application was turned down with the claim that the civil union was not marriage. In 2003, soon after Ontario's courts declared Canadian marriages to be gender neutral, Roddy Shaw and his partner flew to Toronto to marry and came back to the Inland Revenue Department again, this time with the marriage certificate. The application met with failure when the Department announced that the Hong Kong Government refused to recognize same-sex marriage.

While the fight for the recognition of same-sex marriage is yet to succeed, marriage in overseas countries has become a viable option for middle-class same-sex couples in Hong Kong. According to a survey conducted by the Women Coalition in Hong Kong, 70% of 693 female respondents wanted a legal union with their same-sex partners. Two of my informants were consciously planning their marriages in Canada. They both realize that the Hong Kong Government does not recognize same-sex overseas marriages; thus, there are no concrete benefits to getting married in Canada. Yet, they both regard marriage as a meaningful expression of their deep commitment.

Nicole, aged 35, has been in her current relationship for four years. She and her partner are activists in social movements. They had thought of each other as best friends and coworkers in activism. A year ago, they moved in together. Since then, Nicole began to feel that they are a family. Nicole noticed that for some people, living together resulted in conflict and deterioration of the relationship. However, for Nicole, cohabitation allowed her to see that her partner was suitable as a domestic and life partner. After experiencing tension and resolving conflicts in the relationship, she has developed a sense of long-term commitment and is planning for marriage.

At first, I felt a bit worried that the relationship would be adversely affected after living together.... Later on, I find that she is a good domestic partner...

We did have conflicts...Sometimes I need to work very late at night. She did not like it...But we have gradually sorted out the differences. Now we both consider each other a life partner.

After developing a sense of commitment and confirming each other as family members, Nicole would like to marry her partner as validation of their commitment. Nicole was previously married to a man at the age of 21. She sees a major difference between the previous marriage and the current pending marriage. The previous marriage was due to the allocation of a flat under the Home Ownership Scheme. Before meeting government officials for approval of the application, they had to register for marriage first. In contrast to practical reasons, Nicole expressed a deep sense of meaning towards her current marriage plans. The public expression of commitment, which is available to heterosexual couples, is important for building a loving relationship.

My first marriage was very functional... But this time it's very different...(We) know very well that an overseas marriage would not bring us any concrete benefits...it is commitment that constitutes the primary purpose of marriage.

...I've already treated her as my family member. But in reality, it is like we do not have any relationship. Why can't we be like heterosexual couples, obtaining blessings from friends and relatives? Why can't our relationship be made known to others? This could affect a relationship.

Although both Nicole and her partner have been actively involved in the struggle for equal rights of sexual minorities, Nicole emphasized that getting married is not a political strategy or economic gain. Rather, Nicole and her partner see marriage as the opportunity to publicly affirm their mutual commitment and gain recognition from their loved ones. Both Nicole and her partner do not hold a Canadian passport, but they are willing to bear the hefty expenses for arranging an overseas destination wedding. They want to receive the blessings and support of the friends and relatives present in the ceremony and consider the occasion a very special and bonding experience for themselves as well as for their friends and family.

Gigi, aged 33, has a Hong Kong partner who is a Canadian citizen. They were searching for

information about Canadian same-sex marriages around the time of my interviews. A conservative estimate claims that 4% of Hong Kong residents have Canadian citizenship, somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 people. Gigi's partner as well as her partner's family had lived in Canada for many years. There was a possibility that one day, she and her partner might settle down in Canada. Being the spouse of a Canadian citizen, Gigi will be able to share many of the rights that her partner is entitled to in Canada. However, similar to Nicole, marriage is primarily for the purpose of expressing commitment rather than obtaining practical benefits.

There are four reasons for me to plan for marriage. First, after several relationships, I want to have a more stable relationship. Secondly, we both consider each other a suitable partner. Thirdly, the formal means of getting married is available. Fourth, the parents of both sides, especially her parents, are not an obstacle.

Both Nicole and Gigi mentioned that their parents approved of their relationships. They both expected the participation of blood kin in their wedding. The supportive attitude of parents forms an essential condition for the consideration of lesbian couples in getting married. Other lesbians who lack the acceptance of their parents are less inclined to consider marriage. However, they may express their commitment in other creative ways.

For instance, informant Kody chose to take wedding photos in a gay-friendly venue in Taiwan. The photos cost more than \$20,000, which is considered a large sum. When sharing their photos with me, Kody said contentedly:

Not long after we began the relationship, we'd already wanted to take wedding photos. We finally decided to go last year ... to preserve the moment of our youthfulness (laughs) ... She is the only one that I love most in my life, the only person that I love most forever in my life.

Kody's story was one of love at first sight. After starting the relationship for half a year, they began to live together, first with Kody's parents, later in their own rental apartment. They have been living together for more than 14 years. While her partner is not her blood kin in a literal sense, Kody appropriated the metaphor of blood

to describe how much her partner meant to her as a family member. The metaphor signifies deep connection and strong emotion: love flows through every corner of her body and heart. In addition to the use of "lifeblood" and "bodily part," Kody saw her partner as her everyday life, her lifetime, and her very life.

Selina, aged 36, has lived with her partner for five years. Similar to Kody, Selina had not disclosed her sexual identity to her parents, and subsequently, she was not prepared for marriage. However, unlike Kody, she was against the idea of taking wedding photos. Traditionally, Chinese weddings exhibit polarized gender roles through rituals and dress codes. The dragon and phoenix, which are symbols for the groom and bride, are featured prominently in clothing and gifts. Contemporary weddings in Hong Kong combine western elements, such as a church ceremony and wearing western clothing. The polarized gender roles are still maintained in the dress code. Selina resists the idea of dressing like a bride and a groom. She cannot imagine what they would wear if they were to take wedding photos. She said, "I wouldn't mind wearing a man's suit. But my partner would not want to wear a tuxedo, nor would she like to wear a wedding dress." Her partner's gender-neutral image runs counter to the gender script of a wedding.

Selina did find her way of expressing commitment. "After one year of cohabitation, my partner and I wanted to show our commitment to each other. Heterosexual couples will get married, but we cannot. I surfed on the internet and found the ICCR (International Commitment Ceremonies Registrar) issuing commitment certificates." The ICCR provides Commitment Ceremonies registration services for any couple. This service is used to create a permanent historical record of one of the most important events in a couple's life. Many governments do not recognize these unions. The ICCR is created to recognize all of these unions on an international level. Selina shared the website with her friends. Two other couples followed suit.

Selina created their own rites of commitment. Aside from printing the commitment certificate, they went to a beach and exchanged

rings. Although they did not have a formal wedding as their marriage ceremony, that day is celebrated as their anniversary. Recounting the growth of their relationship, Selina said: "In the beginning, it was love. Now it is love plus friendship, plus kinship. I feel that she is my family. If something happened to her and to my parents' family, I would rush to see her first."

Although nonheterosexuals are excluded from the approved rituals represented by marriage in Hong Kong, they seek their own ways of affirming commitment, from private affirmations of love to legal bindings of overseas same-sex marriage. Same-sex couples create their own rituals and traditions as symbolic ways of deepening attachments. Celebrations are not limited to birthdays and St. Valentine's Day but also include all kinds of anniversaries. Selina celebrated the anniversary of her private wedding; Kody invited friends to participate in their tenth anniversary banquet; Spencer commemorated their relationship start date every year; Nicole celebrated the anniversary day of their relationship on a monthly basis; Delaney celebrated the anniversary of the day they moved in together. Being shut out of wedlock, many same-sex couples create their own partnership rites that symbolically cement the relationship. The absence of set rules in formalizing relationships enables them to find innovative ways of privately, as well as publicly, affirming their commitment, which may extend beyond the traditional model of heterosexual couples (cf. Weeks et al. 2001).

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## Providing Care

Not all the lesbian partners aspire to marriage even under allowable circumstances. When sharing experiences of their relationships as families, some informants did not put much emphasis on anniversaries or public affirmations of commitment. Rather, they showed me what they had done for their partners and how much they cared about each other. It is the provision of care that defines the meaning of love and family.

Delaney, 59, has lived with her partner for almost 20 years. They migrated to Canada



11 years ago and returned to Hong Kong for a year during the time of my interviews. Although both are Canadian citizens, Delaney expressed resistance toward registering as a same-sex couple in Canada. She emphasized that the way a person feels about the relationship is more important than a certificate from the marriage registrar. The marriage certificate for her was of little importance when compared with the deep sense of connection in the loving relationship.

For Delaney, it was of utmost importance to mutually feel comfortable when sharing a life together. She highlighted compatible personalities and that her partner was a caring person. They took care of each other and shared each other's worries. Delaney started to see her partner as a family member when they migrated to Canada. No commitment rituals were carried out, but her willingness in giving up her job in Hong Kong and migrating to Canada to care for her partner as well as her partner's parents was essentially a vow of true love.

The other loving relationship that Delaney regards as family is an eight-year relationship with a divorced woman. In this relationship, Delaney shouldered the responsibility of caring for her ex-partner's children. The woman is a mother of two boys, who were aged three and four when they started the relationship. The boys lived with their grandmother. On weekends, Delaney and her partner visited the children and took them out. Despite early resistance toward their relationship, the grandmother finally accepted Delaney and allowed her to enter her house. Sometimes Delaney went to the grandmother's house to give the children haircuts. Despite the attempts of the children's father to damage the relationship between Delaney and the children, Delaney managed to maintain a good relationship with the children and the grandmother. In Delaney's eyes, she and her ex-partner were a couple family. This family could also be extended to include the children and the mother of her ex-partner.

To characterize the type of care that they provided for their partners, informants such as Blake, Selina, and Spencer described themselves like a mother taking care of her child; in addition

to being a lover, they felt like a mother. Spencer outlined the care that she provided for her partner, which included handling household chores.

I call my partner "baby," which means both lover and child. For me, my partner was in a way like a child. I am the one who buys daily items. I boil the water. I remind her to wipe the utensils clean before using. I wash the clothes and cook meals for her. It is like looking after a big child.

Although an informant may describe her role as a maternal one, it is clear from the interview that very often both are caregivers. Blake said both of them were busy, but this did not prevent them from putting effort into the relationship. When asked to provide examples of the efforts made, Blake shared with me the care in everyday life, which concerned not only provision of daily care but also showed how much they cared about each other.

When the weather gets cold, she reminds me to put on more clothes. When I say something, she remembers it in her heart. When I want something, she provides it. When I share my future plans, she gives thought to it... Every morning before she leaves for work, she kisses me... I know she cares about me... respects me ... I treat her the same way.

Providing care also implies safeguarding the partner's welfare. While Delaney did not choose to get married, she took measures to protect her partner's interest when their sense of commitment became strong. Delaney has a joint bank account with her current partner. They also share the ownership of the primary residence.

Blake contended that since same-sex marriage was not recognized in Hong Kong, she was not interested in getting married. She shared with Delaney the concern to protect her partner's benefits. She solicited an insurance agent for naming her same-sex partner as the beneficiary because her partner was neither a spouse nor next of kin. The agent advised her to draw a will first and then, in the insurance, indicate that the will should be followed. Blake drew her will after four years of cohabitation. This was to ensure that her wishes would be honored in the event of any disputes about the inheritance of her property. She felt that a will was more useful than marriage, but a celebrity's death reminded

her of the limitations of the protective measures that she had adopted.

After making the will, I did not see any need for marriage ... But recently I am thinking about the right to receive my partner's deceased body. In the death of Leslie Cheung, his (same-sex) partner Tong-tong could not receive the body. Only a kin, his nephew, could do so. For a Buddhist like me, death is an important issue.

Whether aspiring to marriage or not, most of the informants underlined the importance of providing care and safeguarding each other in the making of their couple families. Despite the lack of a sanctioned institutional framework of marriage and family, the families that lesbian couples form are thriving, capable of delivering care and emotional support. Their creativity needs to be recognized when facing an oppressive environment in which their relationship is deprived of legal and social recognition. As Weeks et al. (2001) argued, nonheterosexual people are not victims that are forced into marginal familial arrangements; rather, they are active agents fashioning their own modes of family life, although in circumstances often not of their own making.

### Integrating with Families of Origin

In articulating the ways that they came to see each other as family, most of the narratives were centered on the development of a sense of life-long partnership, public or private affirmation of commitment, and provision of care. The only exception was the case of Rita, who had not developed a strong sense of commitment in the relationship and talked little of caregiving. However, she considered her partner a family member because her partner had fully integrated into her biological family.

Rita, aged 28, has been involved in her current relationship for less than two years. She lives in an extended family whose members include her parents, grandmother, brother, a cousin, and an uncle. Rita does not hide her same-sex relationships from family members. Her family knew all of her girlfriends, and they finally found out about her sexual orientation when she was upset about

a breakup. Her parents were unhappy in the beginning but have come to accept her sexuality.

Since the parents of Terri, Rita's current partner, had migrated overseas, Terri enjoyed visiting Rita's extended family and stayed at her home on weekends. Rita's family treats Terri like a family member. Their family sentiments were vividly revealed in the heavy involvement of Rita's extended family in Terri's decision to buy an apartment. Rita's parents and uncles referred their property agents and renovation workers to Terri. They went to see the apartments together with Terri and gave their opinions. For a few months, they had intensive discussions about the home purchase. Before the final decision was made, Terri invited Rita's father to see the options that she had in mind. Terri initially preferred another unit but finally followed the advice of Rita's father in order to show him respect. The location of the property was the choice of Rita's family. Terri finally bought a house which was close to Rita's home.

Unlike other informants, Rita was not enthusiastic about building her own couple family. In addition to the need to reserve some privacy for herself, Rita indicated the importance of maintaining a close tie to her blood family. She contended that she would like to spend half of the week with her biological family even when cohabiting with the partner. She treasured sharing meals with her big family and going to restaurants with her father on Saturday mornings.

Other lesbians in my sample usually valued the opportunity of living together exclusively with the partner. Owing to the limited space for expressing intimacy in public areas, same-sex couples often long for a private space to build their own little world. Delaney, for example, distinguished her couple family from family of origin as a space for sex and fun. "Cohabiting with my partner, I can have fun, sex and my friends. I can bring my partner to hang out with my friends." Kody highlighted the home that she built with her partner as a space for freedom.

Moving in together with my partner, I can have more time with her...can hold her in my arms. Unlike how we felt in my parent's home, I can be much freer... (in my parent's home) we found little privacy and we could not freely express ourselves...

While keen to have their own private space and build their own families, most of the informants sought to maintain close relationships with their families of origin. Although lesbian couples may move out of the homes of their blood families, they cement relationships with their blood families through sharing meals, rendering assistance, and maintaining regular contact. For example, both Dilys and Malinda had not disclosed their sexual preference to the parents, so their partners were introduced as close friends to their parents. Their partners integrated well with their blood families and treated as half daughters. On Chinese New Year and other festivals, they dined together as family members. When the parents of Dilys's partner were busy with home renovations, Dilys provided them with assistance. She treated the renovations as her own business.

Malinda made conscious and careful attempts to integrate her partner with her blood family. Her efforts represented her commitment to the relationship. Recounting the process of bringing her partner into the blood family, Malinda said:

I pondered on the ways to integrate my partner naturally into my family. I created some opportunities for my mother to get to know her ... (so) my partner would feel less awkward when joining our family gatherings...When we decided to rent a house together, my mother thought that this allowed us to render mutual care ... When we bought a house together, my mother said she considered her a daughter.

It is worth noting that the couple family is not an alternative to the family of origin. Wong (2007) cautioned against the setting up of a binary opposition between the Western coming out politics and the Chinese coming home model. Seeing the global and the local as permeable constructs, Wong (2007) proposed to focus on the possibilities of cultural hybridity and blending of coming out and coming home. The local activism in the International Day Against Homophobia is preoccupied with the integration of family values and coming out politics. Slogans held by the rally participants such as "Support Tongzhi's (gays and lesbians') Families" and "Don't be prejudiced against your children" indicate that coming out politics do not imply leaving the family and parents.

Coming home can be a way of coming out, just as much as coming out can be a way of coming home. When tongzhi (gays and lesbians) bring their partner home, they can be in the process of bringing their sexuality into the family. Gigi's negotiation of her sexuality with her mother formed a major part of her story in forming families. In previous same-sex relationships, Gigi felt that it was difficult to plan for the future when her mother did not recognize her relationship and prohibited her from staying overnight with the partner. With the current relationship, Gigi succeeded in bringing her partner home and gradually disclosing her sexuality to her mother. Gigi wrote a letter to her mother demanding more freedom. Finally, her mother came to not only accept her staying out on the weekends but also respected her sexual choice. With respect to her plans for marriage in Canada, Gigi does not think that her mother will be a barrier.

Studies of the Western counterparts emphasized the care and support provided by the LGBT communities for its members. Nicole and Spencer are both active in the local LGBT communities and have come out to their families. The supportive network that they developed in the LGBT communities was not a substitute for the ties to the biological families. When sharing their stories of forming families, they both emphasized the importance of integrating with the families of their partners. With a smile of contentment, Nicole elaborated the intimate relationships developed with her partner's mother. Nicole repaired her computer. They went shopping together. During the past Valentine's Day, Nicole cooked a nice meal and invited her partner's mother to celebrate the occasion together. The mother's participation in the couple family was meaningful to Nicole and her partner. They treasured this connection and would like to have the family's blessing for the wedding that they are planning. Similar to Nicole, Spencer puts forth effort in building a good relationship with her partner's mother. When her partner is too busy or impatient to answer her mother's calls, Spencer will talk to the mother for as long as an hour. She is the one who shares recent incidents with her partner's mother.

It is found that in the West, the LGBT communities provide opportunities for care and support that are as strong as the conventional family. Many lesbians and gay men recast close friends as kin and privilege friendships over biological families (Weston 1991; Nari 1992; Weeks et al. 2001). In Hong Kong there is an intertwining of coming home and coming out, which implies that coming home and resolving the tension between sexual identity and family relations will continue to be a major issue for local lesbians. Whether having disclosed their identity to blood families or not, every woman in my sample remained connected to her family of origin.

## Conclusion

The definition of family itself has been duly challenged for its disregard to subjective experiences. Previous models revolved around procreation, blood ties, and legal contracts. Family has now been broadened to include relationships that embody its characteristics so that unconventional relationships also fall within its parameters. The family is redefined as the creation of social relationships that meet emotional and physical needs of adults and children through nurturing, emotional connections and shared responsibilities (Fox and Luxton 2001). Having been redefined as such, the family is no longer merely limited to biological parents, namely, a man and a woman, with children.

The broadening of the parameters that define family has not been lost in Hong Kong. With the globalization of sexual identities and same-sex unions, this has resulted in an unprecedented impact on the forming of families. In this study, lesbian couples in Hong Kong are solicited to articulate their notion of family. It is found that they use creative measures and various languages to validate their partnerships as such, despite being barred from the institution of marriage in their own society. The strategies include creation of their own commitment rites, provision of care and adoption of measures to safeguard their partners' interests, and negotiations of connections with and rendering of assistance to blood families.

This study bridges two seemingly separate areas of research: analyses of homosexual people's relationships with families and description of couple relationships. It questions the heterosexual assumption that underlies such distinction, which equates the families of homosexual people with their families of origin. As my study has shown, Hong Kong lesbians seek not only to maintain ties with blood relations but also to establish families of their own. Their determination to form families with partners is inseparable from their conscious efforts to negotiate connections with their families of origin.

Family is a contested concept. Family structure, then, is both diverse and negotiated. To overcome the controversies in defining family, a more productive line of inquiry is focused on the practices and functions of families that supersede specificities of structure. Family should be conceptualized as a verb—doing family—rather than a noun. We live family rather than dwell within it. Family is what we do (Weeks et al. 2001, p. 38). "Family" represents an active process and a constructed quality of human interaction (Morgan 1999). For same-sex families whose members are not linked by the ties of blood or marriage, it is always challenging for them to develop and sustain a united identity. Their daily practices and commitment rituals become more crucial for the formation and reproduction of these families. Rather than privileging a particular form of family, this view of "doing family" can better capture the multiple discursive practices that people engage in and the agency that they exercise in the making and remaking of their own families.

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## **Part V**

# **Methodology and Policy**

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# Immigrant Adaptation, Poverty and the Family: New Arrivals in Hong Kong from Mainland China

36

Chan Kwok-bun

It is the intent of this chapter to formulate a theoretical framework to discover the multiple antecedents, processes, and consequences of the social and economic integration of new immigrant families from mainland China into Hong Kong society in five areas: family, school, work, neighborhood, and community. An attempt will be made to identify the underlying causes, processes, and consequences of intra and intergenerational upward mobility among some immigrant families, what I call the “upward spiral,” and of reproduction of immobility within and between generations among other families, the “downward spiral,” the institutionalization of poverty and deprivation. I will also evaluate and perhaps dispel myths constructed by the media about the new immigrants from the mainland which, if unchallenged and uncorrected, will result in a social discourse that is the basis of prejudice and discrimination against these newcomers which would injure their chances of integration into society on the one hand and block them from upward mobility on the other hand. There may well be “the other new immigrant community” hidden from public knowledge, which I aim to unearth.

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## The Literature

I have recently completed four research consultancy reports on different immigrant groups for the government of Hong Kong (Chan 2008a, b, 2009a, b). My study (Chan 2008b) of the immigrant adaptation of mainland China professionals is a response to the two major issues often discussed in the sociology of migration—marginality and coping. Because marginalization is tied to social exclusion, it is often seen as something negative. Traditional assimilation theory emphasizes the need for migrants to abandon their ethnic qualities and merge into mainstream society. However, in my study, professionals in Hong Kong have shown that they are willing to retain their marginality—living between China and western markets and between eastern and western cultures. They believe that such marginality offers them not only a human capital edge but also a cognitive strategy for adaptation in Hong Kong. These individuals are aware of the instrumental function of their migration to Hong Kong as it serves their future career development, and they also experience in person the edge that Hong Kong has over the mainland in terms of its legal system and income level. But at the same time, they realize that their real edge lies in their understanding of mainland society and in their personal networks on the mainland. Both personally and professionally, their destination

will perhaps ultimately be the mainland, not Hong Kong. Strangely, this self-contradictory identity recognition has become the collective presentation of my interviewees. Through creative transformation, they have turned their marginality into an effective strategy. Such utilization of their marginality also manifests itself in the construction of their social networks. They actively liaise with peers with similar backgrounds in the local community, many of whom they had already maintained contact with when they were still on the mainland. In other words, the members of their social networks often cannot be simply classified into locals and mainlanders, since certain members within their local social networks also belong to their mainland social networks and often travel between the two places for a variety of reasons. And thus, the social network of the mainland professionals bears a “trans-territorial,” “transnational,” or “cross-border” characteristic. Such a characteristic greatly enhances their ability to manage life changes both in Hong Kong and on the mainland upon their return. From this, one can see that marginality can be a powerful force when used as a strategy by migrants. This force not only functions to enhance social adaptability but also reconstructs, enriches, and deepens social networks, allowing the identity of the professionals to be more flexible, more multifaceted. One face, many masks.

My study also reveals in depth the limitations of Hong Kong’s culture. Public opinion tends to regard the city as an international metropolis, eulogizing the city’s international systems and material components, including the free port, highly developed information systems, ethnic diversity, and so on. But the social conditions revealed through interviews with the mainland professionals reflect the underlying characteristics of Hong Kong society—authoritarianism, conservatism, and a closed mindset; overemphasis on the absolute division between work and personal affairs in social interactions; and a lack of understanding and concern for, and of interaction with, migrants. If Hong Kong has always prided itself on being “an immigrant city,” then this conservatism

is not traditionally rooted but formed over the past decades as the local consciousness of Hong Kong society has matured. Over the past decade, the history of Hong Kong has been marked by unique features, including the fading out of the influence of colonization and the increasing political influence of the mainland. As these three developments overlap chronologically, the self-identity of Hong Kong people is not defined by constructing “who I am” but “who I am not.” Busy at distinguishing between “us” and “the other,” they have gradually forgotten to reflect on the rationality and tolerance of some established social values and concepts. As noted above, Hong Kong people’s sense of superiority, their alienation from outsiders, the inevitability of working overtime, the absolute authority of the hierarchy, the rationale for short-term results, and the compulsion towards consumerism require active public debate. The cultural and mass media sectors should stimulate continuous reflection within the local society, making it possible for the coexistence of divergent cultures and mutual acceptance by different ethnic groups.

The mainland professionals in Hong Kong, like many new immigrants from the mainland, tend to liaise with their immigrant peers of similar background. As professionals, they are equipped with knowledge that places them within the Hong Kong middle class. Most of my interviewees possess a certain social advantage in terms of financial status. Migration is also a process of the upheaval and restructuring of emotions. Moving from one social structure to another, they suffer, in the initial stage, from an acute sense of uprootedness. The sense of fraternity brought about by a shared language, life experiences, and cultural background among the co-ethnics is definitely comforting. Throughout mankind’s history, “like-attracted-to-like” is a natural response for all migrants worldwide and is a common sign before the emergence of certain defined ethnic communities and groups. During the nonformal personal interactions at the preliminary stage where individuals share their difficulties and pain, they begin to realize that the problems and difficulties

they face in the new environment are not theirs alone but are shared with others because they are caused by the social structure. When they realize that individual problems must be solved through public action such as mutual assistance and care, institutionalized organizations and ethnic communities are born.

The formation of peer groups on one hand satisfies the emotional needs of migrants and on the other carries the instrumental function of mutual help and benefit. This is true for all nations and ethnic groups, perhaps more intensely for Chinese society, where traditionally interpersonal relations are built on blood ties, marriage, and territorial proximity. In an alien environment, migrants naturally seek help from their families, relatives, fellow townspeople, fellow students, or friends. The existence of specific communities (e.g., family associations and fellow townspeople associations in which members are classified by blood relationship and geographical relationship, respectively) plays an active role in helping newcomers to adapt more quickly and smoothly. But at the same time, mainstream society has its own interpretations of the emergence of these minority groups, criticizing them for making coterie out of new immigrants, for their refusal to assimilate, and for disloyalty. It shows up the mainstream “blaming-the-victim” discourse which casts and labels the victims as the troublemakers. This situation also occurs with the mainland professionals. Society believes that these people come to Hong Kong for money only and that Hong Kong is nothing but a stepping-stone, a stopover for their next destination, where they can make yet more money. As they come here voluntarily for monetary gain, they have to suffer the bitter fruit of their own decisions and solve the problems and pressures they face in Hong Kong on their own. In my interviews, many of the respondents lamented that their professional status did not earn them either the regard of the Hong Kong Government or warmth from society. Some believed that after recruiting them, the government simply abandoned them—sort of to live and let die. Worse, some believed they are cheap elites brought in by a capitalist society that needs but exploits them.

There is a deep-seated labeling effect at work here in Hong Kong. Many Hong Kong people are prejudiced against the mainlanders. In terms of material culture and its legal institutions, Hong Kong has much to offer, but in terms of ethnic inclusion, or acceptance of outsiders, Hongkongers are obstinately exclusionary. Back in the colonial era, the government had no real understanding of—and thus did not address relationships among—ethnicities. But today, Hong Kong society has transformed itself into a “knowledge-based” model, and is faced with tremendous competitions for talent around the world.

In my research consultancy report (Chan 2009b) for the Hong Kong Government on the adaptation of mainland immigrant artists and cultural workers working and living in Hong Kong, I wrote that they suffer from a “quadruple marginality.” In regard to the political economy of art and artists in Hong Kong in general, and the work and economic development of the artists in particular, mainland immigrant artists in Hong Kong have discovered to their displeasure upon arrival in Hong Kong that they have come to the wrong place, a place that does not value art and artists highly. There is a deep “lack of fit” between art and society in Hong Kong. Artists are misfits, occupationally, and socially dislocated.

Mainland immigrant artists in Hong Kong suffer from a “quadruple marginality.” The first moment of marginality is the consequence of art and artists having been marginalized, a process socially constructed by a three-cornered reciprocal influence of government, business, and society. Politically and administratively, the Hong Kong government has not viewed art and culture as something of primary importance, in fact treating them as similar to entertainment, leisure, or sports. In business and industry, materialism, commercialism, and capitalism have long developed a stronghold in Hong Kong society. In the social arena, Hongkongers have in turn internalized the modes of thinking, attitudes, and values of the government and the business world: being an artist is not a lucrative career for the youth because art is seen as not producing a surplus value, a profit. This first moment of marginality has historical as

well as structural causes, which defies the efforts of individuals or organizations to change.

The second moment of marginality stems from negative labels, even stigma, having been attached to mainland immigrant artists in Hong Kong. Immigrant artists are immigrants from the mainland first, artists second. Being an immigrant from China is a master status, a stigma, which singularly determines how the artist and his or her works are treated in Hong Kong society. The stigma constructs both visible and invisible boundaries separating the locals and the immigrants. Prejudice and discrimination are discernible in the impermeability of these boundaries. That immigrants' formal qualifications and work achievements prior to immigration are not recognized in Hong Kong adds to the "immigrant's plight." More often than not, they must "start all over again," from the bottom.

The third moment of marginality happens when artists from Hong Kong, whether they are indigenous or are immigrants, face prejudice and discrimination in the mainland's artistic community. The art world of Hong Kong suffers from a lack of organization and leadership; as a result of art works and artists chosen to represent Hong Kong during exhibitions in the mainland may not be Hong Kong's best. Artists from Hong Kong are not held in high esteem in the mainland.

The fourth moment of marginality traces its origin to colonialism. Western art styles, values, tastes, and conventions prevail over those of the Chinese—a deep sense of superiority of the west/the foreign sits uncomfortably with an even deeper sense of inferiority of the east/the local, resulting in a profound moment of internal colonialism: local Chinese artists devalue each other's works. All this has far-reaching implications and consequences for the government's priority in funding and budget allocation, deciding on salaries, and so on.

The origins of the mainland immigrant artists' plight are historical and structural, but the artists' coping strategies remain primarily personal or certainly not collectivistic enough. The coping strategies of the artists are of three kinds. The first strategy of coping is in with the construction

of cognitions and reasoning. Through rationalization and self-persuasion, the immigrant artists compare their present condition in Hong Kong and their past condition in the mainland to "find" reasons to self-justify their decisions about migration and to attain self-consolation and comfort. One manipulates thinking to produce positive feelings, sort of working on the mind to take care of the heart and the body, indeed an example of a "managed heart" or what sociologists call "management of emotions."

The second strategy of coping is instrumental in nature. Being practical, this type of strategy aims at problem-solving. One visible technique is what we dub as "half and half" coping, which could take different forms. Some artists choose to put artistic work "on hold" during the initial years of their arrival in Hong Kong and then return to it when economics allow. Other artists take on non-art-related work in the daytime, their first shift, to provide for themselves and their family and engage in artistic production at night, their "second shift." This two-shift existence is exhausting and stressful, oftentimes operating in a condition of "self-exploitation." The artists shuttle between the art world and the worldly world, the boundary of which is marked out or marked off during a day, a week, or indeed an entire life course. Yet other artists undertake art-related jobs and try to produce artistically simultaneously. Teaching art is a popular choice, but it entails considerable expenditure of time, energy, and emotions, much to the distress of the artists. An immigrant artist is a half-half man, a divided self. To be or not to be, that is the question. He teaches because he must. When he teaches, he is thinking of doing art. When he is doing art, he is thinking of teaching, which he must do to live. The third coping strategy is emotion-focused. Passion for and commitment to art and artistic creation are deep inner resources which are often invoked by the artists for self-motivation and for management of stress and distress. Art students are the art teachers' major source of social, emotional, and economic support.

There are five ironies about the social condition of the immigrant artists. The first irony is perhaps the most striking one: while the marginality of the



immigrant artists is their identity and personhood which cause them much suffering, this same marginality, once bestowed on them, is something they cannot and should not do without. They discard their marginality—for example, by becoming populist and commercially successful—at their own peril, ironically, because living at the margin sharpens their sensitivity and artistry which enables them to see, and feel, what others do not because the latter are at the center. Marginality separates the artists and the non-artists. Marginality indeed has its upside and downside, promise and cost. This may be the deepest irony.

The second irony is that coping with suffering produces yet more suffering. Since doing art is not a viable way to make a living in Hong Kong, our artists must do other things in addition to art. Once art production is a part-time activity, society devalues and disdains part-time artists, which makes it difficult for these artists to obtain a value in the market for their products because part-timers, in the eyes of the consumers, cannot and would not produce good work. Society pays half-timers half price for their half-time work. This is an example of “blaming the victim” ideology, holding the victim responsible for his plight which is not of his own making. Once this ideology is internalized by the victim, something horrible may happen: he begins to blame himself. Meanwhile, the status quo continues.

Art has multiple functions: to communicate with the masses, affect them emotionally; to construct future scenarios of utopia and possibilities; and to mobilize the masses to effect social transformations. Yet artists cannot change their own plight—like doctors who cannot cure themselves. This is the third irony.

The Chinese overseas are world-famous for their “genius of organizing.” As immigrants in the Chinese diaspora, for decades, they engender ethnic and class resources, they construct social networks, and they put social capital to strategic use—all in an attempt to do business and to create wealth. Yet mainland immigrant artists do not seem to be able to organize themselves to transform their own fate—on their own or collectively. This is the fourth irony.

The fifth irony is due to the lack of middlemen, the “go-betweens.” Hong Kong businessmen are well known for their acumen of taking advantage of their “middleman” status to mediate between divergent interests of Asia and the world. Yet few attempts have been made on the part of the immigrant artists to bridge the art worlds of the Chinese and the west.

While my respondents continued to hold positive views of art and culture in Hong Kong, saying the present is an improvement of the past, their assessment of their future prospects is one of gloom. In fact, art and culture in Hong Kong is *in a stalemate*. Failing to see a way out for themselves, many immigrant artists will choose to leave Hong Kong. Would-be immigrant artists may decide Hong Kong is the wrong place to migrate to. So, they won’t come here. Those who have chosen to stay may one day give up their artistic career altogether. None of these scenarios would benefit Hong Kong society.

In traditional Chinese culture, the economic function of the family is treated as a most important one. Family studies indicate that this family ideology is still prevalent in Hong Kong. Shae and Wong (2009) list seven primary characteristics of the family ideology that have been dominant in Hong Kong since the 1970s. Familial division of labor based on gender is one. Husbands are regarded as the main economic providers. Once husbands fail to be breadwinners when they have lost their jobs, they would lose their self-esteem and their (legitimate) power in the family. Shae and Wong (2009) also point out that, in Hong Kong, families are viewed as the very foundation of social order, and family malfunctioning is regarded as the root of social problems. It is widely believed, rightly or wrongly, that many social and personal problems are the result of “broken families.” Chan (陳惜姿 2006) studies 12 housewives living in Tian Shui Wai where new immigrants from the mainland concentrate and concludes that the main factor causing family tragedies in the new poor immigrant families is the failure of the husbands. Housework division is based on gender, an arrangement which is very obstinate among the working class. Men refuse to come home to take over wives’ housework even

after they have lost their jobs or become underemployed. Once men fail in the job market, they also fail in their families—as husband and as father. They have little currency or capital left to exchange or offer as the economic role is the only role they have been granted by society and the only role they know how to play. They may want to be more kind to their children, but they still believe in patriarchy and hold firmly to it (Hong Kong Christian Service 1996).

While very few local studies systematically examine the role of the child in housework, some scholars focus their attention on the female child in housework, basically taking on woman's work as part of their socialization into motherhood, sort of like mothers, like daughters, thus reproducing the family ideology. Manke et al. (1994) suggest a three-corner perspective (father, mother, and children) to posit that housework is not only a gender issue but also a generation and class issue.

Single motherhood is closely connected with stigmatization, poverty, and welfare dependence (Polakow 1993; Choy and Moneta 2002; Lewis 1997; Edin and Lein 1997; Brown and Moran 1997; Harris 1993; Jayakody and Stauffer 2000; Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986). In many societies, single motherhood is regarded as incomplete or deficient parenthood because single mothers fail to “fulfill the obligations of a wife, of a ‘normalized’ family life, and of a ‘proper’ motherhood” (Polakow 1993). Compared to widowed single mothers, unmarried single mothers and divorced single mothers are more likely to be stigmatized and defined as a problem (Lewis 1997; Polakow 1993). Some scholars (Kok and Liow 1993; Choy and Moneta 2002) point out, because of the Confucianist system of values, single mothers in Chinese societies are more harshly stigmatized than their counterparts in North America. The stigma attached to single mothers “discourages the disclosure of” their needs and difficulties (Choy and Moneta 2002). Most Chinese single mothers thus deal with “their problems on their own” rather than ask for help (Leung 1993; Choy and Moneta 2002).

In the absence of a husband, single mothers play the roles of breadwinner and home carer

simultaneously. As Lewis and Hobson (1997) state, this dual role of “combining full-time work and care” is daunting. Some single mothers cope by taking part-time jobs with low payment, which further increases their chances of staying poor. Many single mothers depend on welfare provided by the state. Welfare dependence further stigmatizes and humiliates single mothers (Polakow 1993).

Though still legally married or not divorced or separated yet, the “absent fathers,” by virtue of their scanty participation in the family, have, by default, created a familiar condition: their wives as “single mothers” weathering the storms and stress of family life—alone.

Meanwhile, single motherhood causes psychological or emotional problems. Some studies (Brown and Moran 1997; Davies et al. 1997) show that single mothers report higher rates of depression and psychological distress than married mothers. Single mothers are more likely to experience humiliation or entrapment, which are two important factors causing their depression (Brown and Moran 1997). Edin (2000) shows that many single mothers are reluctant to enter marriage again. Men's violent behaviors and their general lack of trustworthiness force single mothers to delay remarriage.

Other studies discuss how single mothers struggle to survive. Harris (1993) argues that American single mothers “leave welfare through work in two ways”: either getting a job which can move them off the welfare trap or combining “work and welfare.” He believes improving the human capital of single mothers through training and education is helpful in enhancing their chances of leaving welfare. Choy and Moneta (2002) suggest functional social networks may help Chinese single mothers to receive support, overcome negative ideology, and validate their lives. Edin and Lein (1997) discover that single mothers develop survival strategies to make ends meet. For example, in order to get their welfare benefits, some single mothers hide their supplementary incomes from their caseworkers.

Wong (2007) points out that providing a “social security net” and enhancing human capital

of the poor are the main strategies used by the government to alleviate hardship. He states that the policymakers overlook a significant factor: social exclusion, which is the main cause of poverty, especially after Hong Kong's economic restructuring. New immigrants, elderly persons, and women are marginalized, and they lack bargaining power in the urban labor market. The long-term economic slowdown renders them more vulnerable in the labor market. On the other hand, as marginalized workers and just by getting a short period of training or retaining, they have great difficulty in changing their positions in the labor market. Thus, enhancing human capital is not very helpful for them to alleviate poverty. Instead, Wong suggests that the government should formulate a macroeconomic policy with social development goals and pay more attention to the working poor who are trapped in poverty. Wong (2000) also examines the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) scheme of Hong Kong and points out that "the level of benefit of the CSSA scheme is not adequate to raise the poor out of poverty but rather creates a poverty trap for the recipients." Moreover, the CSSA scheme deliberately creates a label for a dependency culture for the poor, which discourages "the poor from getting help from the CSSA scheme." In his discussion of strategies of reducing poverty in Hong Kong, Mok (莫泰基 1999) observes that poverty has in fact become more serious while Hong Kong was enjoying the great economic boost in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Hong Kong was a refugee/immigrant society in the late 1940s. Like tens of thousands of others, I came to Hong Kong with my 13-member nuclear family in 1950 as refugees. I grew up in a poor refugee family in a 7-storey resettlement block in the suburb, Tsuen Wan, New Territories, which was built by the colonial government to temporarily house the refugees from the mainland. That was my first experience with poverty. Children in the New Territories at the time seldom finished high school. They were sent by parents to work in textile factories which were then mushrooming in Tsuen Wan as a new industrial town. I am now finishing a book about my

childhood in poverty and about my poor refugee father (Chan *n.d.*).

My first scholarly encounter with deprivation and its deleterious effects dated back to my graduate school days when I was examining the relationship between class and domestic violence for my doctoral dissertation (Chan 1978). I discovered what Sennet and Cobb (1972) call "the hidden injuries of class" and "the corrosion of character" among the poor which "pushed" them into violence against their loved ones, sometimes killing their wives and children. The poor live in a "world of pain" (Rubin 1976), which is not merely about not having enough money to live out their lives, which is bad enough, but is, more seriously, about the stresses and frustrations of a daily existence that breeds psychological impotency and helplessness. Buddhists call the injury of having lost a job, for example, "the first arrow," while the resultant self-torture and demoralization is "the second arrow," arguably a lot more harmful.

In despondency, the poor lash out against others, physically and/or verbally. Sometimes, they somatize these pains, turn them inward, and attack themselves, either by becoming ill physically (ulcers, cancers) or mentally (psychiatric disorders) or by suicide—an argument I (1974) developed in my master's thesis, using a stress and coping approach. Trained as a social psychologist who is fond of adopting the family as a middle-range (between the individual and society) unit of analysis, I have published extensively in the field of migration, Chinese overseas studies, economic sociology in the Weberian tradition, and ethnic entrepreneurship. Among other lessons I have learned and reported in my two Routledge books (Chan 2005a, b), one paradox is noteworthy here: migration has two faces. On the one hand, it emancipates the individual, giving him opportunities for social mobility, even spectacular entrepreneurship—what he could not do in the place of departure, he does it very well in the place of arrival (Chan and Chiang 1994). This is enabling. But, on the other hand, migration handicaps the individual in many deep, structural ways because he is often treated as a stranger, even among his own ethnic

kind—such as being a mainland Chinese in Hong Kong. His opportunities are being blocked or denied by prejudice and discrimination, which could well be the first sign of the immigrant's downward spiral into poverty. My four research consultancy reports mentioned earlier (Chan 2008a, b, 2009a, b) for the government of Hong Kong, on returnees of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Israel, on professional immigrants, and on artists and cultural workers from mainland China, have shown the damaging effects of prejudice and discrimination. However, my training in social psychology has alerted me to the dialectics of structure and agency: in the face of sweeping societal and historical forces, the individual remains resourceful, resilient and innovative—sort of making the most of life, doing their best under the circumstances.

In my book titled *Poverty and Change* (2011) and my paper titled “Poverty, Coping and Hope” presented at the Central Policy Unit, Hong Kong Government (2009), I, reflecting on 17 case studies of new immigrant families in Hong Kong, make several observations. First, local poor married men failed *twice*, initially when they were not able to marry a suitable woman in Hong Kong, then when they, many years later, after marrying a woman from the mainland, were not able to conduct themselves as a good husband nor a good father, probably not a good brother either. Second, the traditional family ideology in Hong Kong, and in the mainland, has effectively prevented these men from experimenting with alternative familial roles—other than that of a primary economic provider but not being very good at it. Though unemployed, they refused to share in housework and childcare, were absent from the family in body and in mind (“the absent father”), turned to various forms of addiction (to gambling, extramarital affairs, drugs, alcoholism, criminality, child and wife abuse) to combat loss of self-esteem, self-worth, and family power as a result of failure in the only role they knew how to play: providing for the family economically. My findings find resonance in recent works of local scholars (陳惜姿 2006; Wong Wai-ling 2004; Wong 2003; 黃洪, 李劍明 2000).

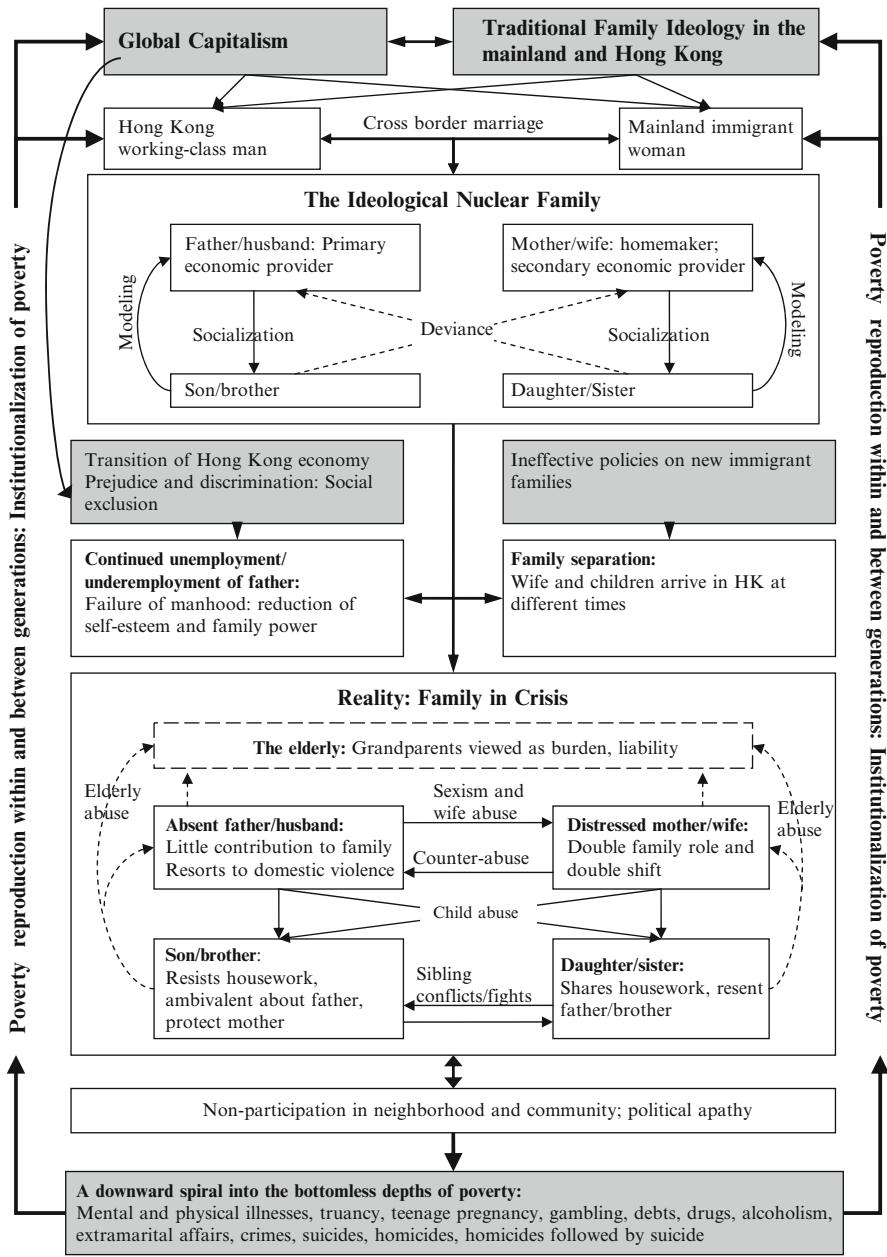
Turning to the married women, I found a different picture altogether. The absence of the father had one consequence, among others: his wife was turned into a variant form of “single mother” though she was not yet divorced or separated. However, a good sociologist will never lose sight of the agency of the individual. These “single mothers” faced the brutal facts of life head-on, taking on the double role of motherhood and substitute fatherhood, as well as the double shift, first at work, then at home—not to mention the burden of husband-care. While some women were resilient copers, offering the family a glimpse of hope and a future, many others succumbed to illnesses, mental stresses, fatigue, family fights and quarrels, helplessness, and hopelessness—which were the forerunners of many family tragedies, be they homicides, suicides, or homicides followed by suicides, which continue to shock Hong Kong society.

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### **Toward a Theoretical Framework with Methodological Implications**

My review of works done by others and by myself enables me to construct a theoretical framework (Figs. 36.1 and 36.2) made up of 19 postulates as follows:

1. The family ideology of Hong Kong society consists of two main premises: first, married men, poor or rich, must be, first and foremost, the primary economic provider of the family; second, married women, working or not, must discharge their care-taking role of doing housework and providing emotional support to the familial others. Men and women “do families” very differently. As it happens, the maintenance and perpetuation of such an ideology depends on, among other factors, a collusion between husband and wife and, to a certain extent, son and daughter, brother and sister, in terms of their *collective conformity* to such a familial arrangement.
2. Unlike in the middle class, this family ideology is particularly intense and hard to change among the working class.
3. Mainland China women married to Hong Kong working-class men would themselves



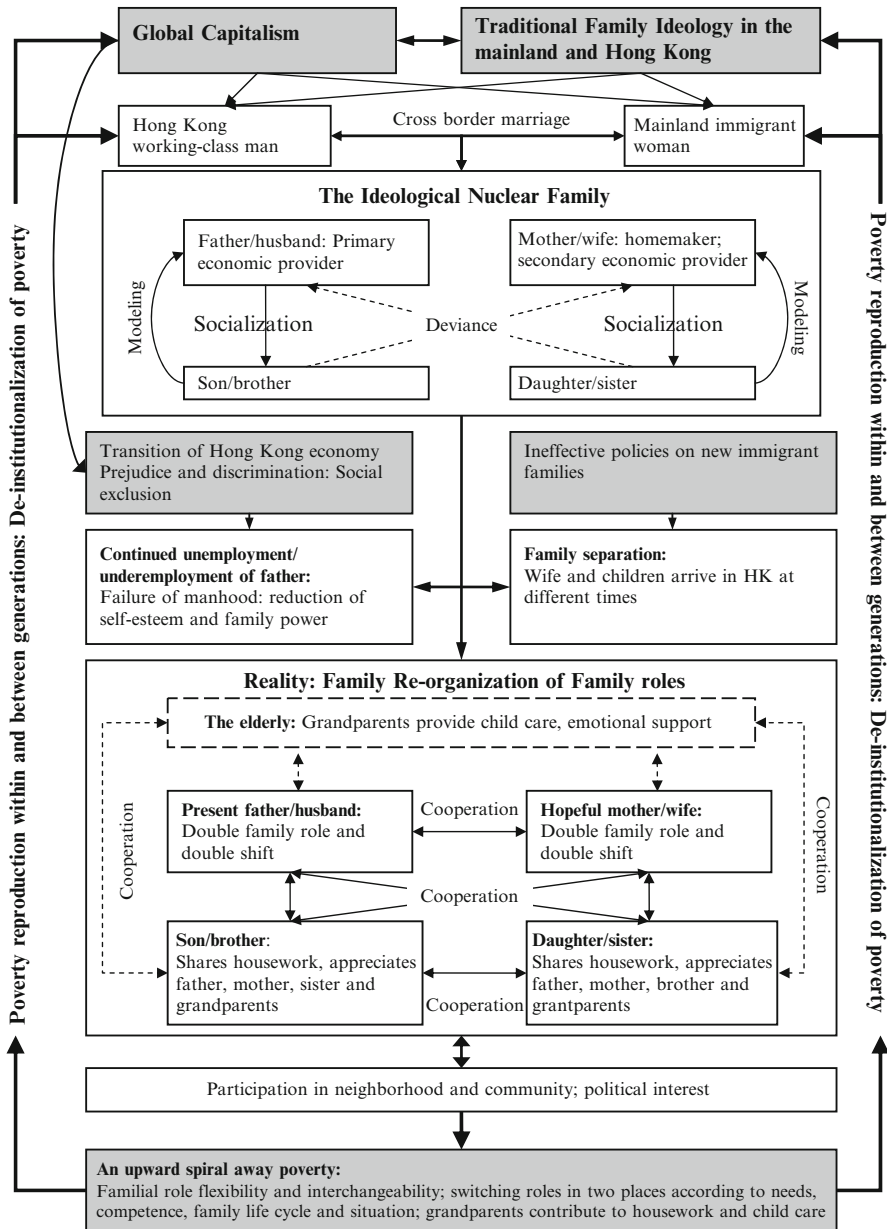
**Fig. 36.1** A downward spiral: global capitalism, family ideology, and institutionalization of poverty

also be likely to subscribe to this traditional family ideology though, perhaps a few years after arrival in Hong Kong, they would negotiate with their husbands for a personal space to express their needs of autonomy, gender equality, and freedom, from which, unfortunately, marital conflicts, even violence, may

emanate. Fights for freedom are seldom conflict-free.

4. The singularity of married men's economic role and function and its resistance to change means that these men, even at times of their unemployment or underemployment, are unlikely to switch roles with their wives, for





**Fig. 36.2** An upward spiral: poverty reduction and cooperation between two genders and three generations in two places

example, taking over or sharing housework and childcare responsibilities, which would incur the resentment of their wives—and perhaps their daughters.

5. As the self-esteem and power of the husband/father is primarily determined by economics, his inability to hold on to a job means that he will withdraw from the family physically as

well as psychologically, which ushers in the “absent father” phenomenon. Rarely at home, but when he is, the husband/father would not abdicate his traditional role of being a disciplinarian, meting out punishment, verbal and/or physical, to his wife and children. The family sociologist has asked this question for decades in the form of an irony: why is he so

- abusive to his loved ones even though he spends so little time with them?
6. Socialization of the children is acted out in accordance with the prevailing family ideology. Housework is mundane, uninteresting, unrewarding, unwanted—or what sociologists call “dirty work at home.” Sons model after their fathers to avoid it. Trying to grapple with the daily double shift of work and family care, mothers would “lean on,” even coerce, their daughters to share the housework, while their sons are resisting, thus incurring the resentment of their sisters. As long as the larger cultural and structural forces of society in terms of the family ideology remain unchanged, what started out in one generation is passed on to the next generation, thus reproducing the status quo. Meanwhile the resentment, even wrath, of mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters carries on.
  7. The plight of the new poor immigrant families continues. There is little way out, and they are “trapped,” as long as the poor married men are subject to social and economic exclusion while Hong Kong is transforming itself into a knowledge economy—and while the poor immigrant women are subject to ethnic/gender prejudice and discrimination both within and outside the family—she has to confront a sexist husband, a sexist society, and possibly even a sexist son. Her husband being absent physically and emotionally, she is turned into a “single mother” by default. As it happens, these families, as collectivities, together face a “triple jeopardy” in terms of three types of discrimination—class, ethnic, and gender—which compound each other.
  8. At the domestic level, the key to a better future seems to be in the hands of one person: the husband/father. Whether or not he manages to change, switches roles with his wife, even his children, whether he is flexible in discharging his family functions, and whether he is able to confront his own sexism and ethnic prejudice, even changes himself and his son in the face of a powerful family ideology, he holds the key to the future of his family.
  9. Doing families as a concept points to ways in which gender and generation politics are actually played out and acted out on a daily basis. When done successfully, we see close intrafamilial cooperation, solidarity, and exciting exchange of roles, functions, ideas, energy, and love between members of the gender and generation categories, perhaps a requisite condition to withstand the many slings and arrows of life, including poverty. During this critical process of family reorganization and in the spirit of hope and optimism, cooperation, and solidarity, there is the promise of an upward spiral of intra- and intergenerational mobility. When done miserably, we see family stresses, fights, abuses, suicides, homicides—and a downward spiral into the depths of poverty, from one generation to another. What first begun as temporary (only one generation), soft, and changeable has now become permanent (intergenerational immobility), hard, unchangeable, and doomed.
  10. The government policy requires the mainland wives and their children to separately apply for immigration into Hong Kong, resulting in their arrivals in Hong Kong at different times and, in turn, various forms of prolonged family separation and dispersal: when the mother arrives later than her children, the father would also act as a mother in Hong Kong, and when the mother arrives earlier than her children, she would commute between the two places to fulfill her dual roles as wife in Hong Kong and as mother/father in the mainland. Family separation and its deleterious social as well as economic effects (as a result of the difficulties experienced by wife/mother and husband/father at work compounded by stresses of parenthood) are the artifacts of government policies. Doing families in two different places strains the families emotionally, physically, and financially.
  11. The adaptation of new immigrant families is not all inside. Successful immigrant adaptation is also affected by the availability of resources in the kin network (in Hong Kong and the mainland), community, and neighborhood,

and one's differential social participation in and access to such resources. Members in the extended family in both places who are resourceful and helpful are integral to the practice of transnationalism, defined as using coping resources in more than one place. Grandparents of both the wife's and the husband's side can either enable the family or disable it, not to mention the possibility of themselves being subject to exploitation and/or elderly abuse. What one lacks within the family, one would want to find outside it, in the workplace, community, and neighborhood, the results of which depend on one's knowledge of and readiness to utilize these resources when they exist. The fact that one is in need of help does not mean one is able or willing to seek help. Ironically, adaptive families are often high in social participation and utilization of public resources, while maladaptive families are typically low in both counts, thus setting in a vicious cycle and a spiral of entrapment. The internals and the externals exert reciprocal influences on each other.

12. During and after migration, adaptive immigrant families would enter into a phase of reorganization by negotiation and cooperation between two genders, three generations, in two places, while the opposite is predicted for maladaptive families falling into disorganization, even crisis.
13. Much can be gained by introducing a concept here: immigrant capital. In conventional discourse on new immigrants from the mainland, the typical question is: what do they lack and need from us? This is a question of "demand." An equally important question is: what have they brought, from one place to another, to us? This is a question of "supply." Once this "supply" question is asked, we would begin to enumerate the kinds of immigrant capital that would have bearing on one's adaptation and integration and on society at large. Examples include material as well as non-material resources such as cheap labor, educational qualifications, work skills, values toward family, marriage, kin and the elderly, alternative styles of parenting and doing families, filial piety, immigrant need for achievement, frugality, and transnationalism. Now numbering almost one million, these immigrants are quickly forming a community that has the potentials of contributing to the bridging and integration of the Hong Kong and mainland economies.
14. Immigrant women—and their children—are the "newcomers" who are young, resilient, optimistic, hopeful, and aspiring. Their husbands are the locals, the "old-timers." A conceptual distinction between the newcomers and the old-timers sensitizes us to the possibility of the former helping themselves *and* the latter to integrate into Hong Kong society. Their eventual integration may have some unforeseen positive impact on the culture and structure of Hong Kong as an immigrant society.
15. A wise, comprehensive plan of a sociological study of poverty and adaptation to it would take the family, not the individual, as the unit of analysis, keeping its analytical gaze at the "psychosocial interiors of the whole family"—and at how the gender and generation politics of the family are acted out, cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Conceptually and methodologically, the sociologist is advised to do intensive whole family case studies—before, during, and after migration.
16. Understood in this way, a study of poverty or, for that matter, of the middle class, or of affluence and the elite, is first and foremost a study in the sociology of marriage, the family, generation, and gender.
17. For decades, family studies in Hong Kong and overseas tend to overlook the children's views, feelings, and perceptions about their families, which is a serious theoretical and empirical omission. Typically, parents are asked by researchers about their children's condition and experience but rarely the other way round, citing reasons such as children are not insightful or articulate enough, although creative methods (e.g., asking children to make drawings of their families and then to "read" and interpret them) have been found to generate both reliable and valid data. To study the family wholly, children

must be treated as an important category of analysis, both in terms of what the family has done to them and what they have done to the family, thus taking the reciprocal, two-way influence between family and children seriously (李文清、陳國賁 2012).

18. The new millennium is one of hypermobility of all things: ideas, people, capital, goods, cash, culture, emotions, loyalty, and information. A deep, comprehensive study of the integration of mainland new immigrant families would need to keep in firm, steady view of the triangulation of three variables: migration, family, and (mal) adaptation. As people and families move, so should sociology itself, thus the importance of developing innovative, portable research structures, methodologies, techniques, staff resources, ways of managing research projects, etc. For example, given the high speed, frequency, and intensity of border-crossing among new immigrant families, which probably are “doing families” in not one but two or three sites, the flexibility and portability of the research enterprise is integral to the sociologists being able to “catch up with” their subjects’ conduct. There is a good case to argue for a “mobile sociology” (Chan & Chan). In the case of these new immigrants, some interviews may need to be done with some family members (e.g., grandparents, mothers to look after children) who, for whatever reasons, “stay or are left behind” in the mainland, an intelligent, though necessary, practice of transnationalism to cope with the adversity of family separation and dispersal.
19. The sociologist C. Wright Mills’s (1959) “sociological imagination” would serve us a final reminder: the private sphere of the family is a mere mirror of the public sphere—the public determines the private. Gender and generation politics are played out both inside and outside the family, simultaneously. The sociologist then must place the family within a social context and in history—that is, contextualizing and historicizing the family as an object of study.

## Conclusion and Implications for Theory, Research, and Policy

This chapter adopts the principle of *multiplicity* and attempts to bear it on social theory, conceptualization and causation, methodology, data analysis, and policy formulation. The researcher would need to disentangle the dynamics of reciprocal influences among *six* forces: societies (pre- and post-migration), migration as process, family, workplace, the social milieu, and adaptation and integration. There are several implications for policy development in Hong Kong.

First, policies regarding immigrant adaptation and integration would need to attend to things the mainland and Hong Kong governments can and should do about conditions, policies, and programs in the two societies *before, during, and after migration*.

Second, policymakers would alert themselves to the *whole* families and their transactions with their kin networks in the mainland and Hong Kong, workplace, neighborhood, and community, rather than to the individual per se. The whole is larger than the sum total of its parts. When we “fix” the family, we would have “fixed” the individual, at least partly; the same cannot be said about its reverse.

Third, one needs to attend to the *multiple* causation of immigrant integration and thus the importance of moving up and down the different levels of analysis: from personal, familial, and institutional to structural and even transnational. Policies would need to be sensitized to not holding the poor individual, not even the poor family, wholly responsible for their lack of integration, or we fall into the trap of “blaming the victim.”

Fourth, the new arrivals do not constitute a homogeneous whole and neither are they a social and historical constant. One must be mindful of salient differences in the needs of *different* groups: wives/mothers, husbands/fathers, sons/brothers, daughters/sisters, grandmothers, and grandfathers. This sensitivity to group differences would warn us against the idea of one policy (size) fitting all.

Fifth, the policy researcher will examine the family life history, or “career of the family,” *over time*, thus taking the historical dimension seriously. The fear of poverty being transmitted from one generation to the next is a real one.

In this chapter, I put forth 19 postulates of a theoretical framework as a conceptual attempt to probe the social and economic adaptation of new mainland China immigrant families in Hong Kong. More specifically, the framework focuses on differential pathways to an “upward spiral,” enabling intra- and intergenerational mobility among some immigrant families on the one hand, and to a “downward spiral,” a reproduction and institutionalization of poverty among other immigrant families on the other hand. I posit that the central differentiating factor that separates the two types of families is the extent to which the husband/father manages to flexibly redefine and enact his roles in his relations with his wife, son, daughter, and his own parents. Also, can husband/father, wife/mother, son/brother, daughter/sister, grandfather, grandmother switch and exchange roles and functions, share housework, provide support to each other, come in and out of each other’s roles and functions? What are the circumstances under which families in transition would manage capital convertibility while working toward a creative, innovative redefinition and reorganization of family functioning and carving out spaces for the emergence of new family forms through hybridization at a crossroads of modernity and traditionality, capitalism and communism, femininity and masculinity, rurality and urbanity? What are the grounds for cooperation, sympathy, familial role flexibility and interchangeability in the context of familial transactions and intersections between three generations, two genders, two places?

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# Researching Migrant Chinese Families in Hong Kong: Changing Perspectives and Methodologies

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Sam Wong

Hong Kong has experienced tremendous social and political transformations over the past three decades. The 1997 Question, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998 and the outbreak of the deadly virus, SARS, in 2003, have all touched the nerves of every family in the territory. How these families respond, and adapt, to these drastic changes has, therefore, sparked considerable interest among both local and overseas academics. Numerous attempts have been made to offer insights into conceptualising “Hong Kong families”, pioneered by Mitchell (1972), Wong (1972) and Lau’s thesis on “utilitarianistic familism” (1977) to recent studies by Lee (1992), Skelton (1994), Ng (1994), Wong (1996), Lui and Wong (1998), Lui et al. (1998), Chu and Chan (1999), Shae and Ho (2001) and Chow (2001).

Despite their contributions, these studies have two shortcomings. Theoretically, “Hong Kong families” is a generic term. It comprises families of different characteristics, ethnic compositions and cultural structures. The cultural backgrounds and social needs of the migrant families from mainland China and the South Asian families in Hong Kong, Keezhangatte (2006) argues, can be different from that of the established Chinese families in Hong Kong. We, therefore, need to deconstruct the term and look into the diversity,

dynamics and complexity of different families. Methodologically, how “Hong Kong families” is researched has not been adequately explained or explicitly discussed in the studies. As research methodology provides perspectives into what questions are asked, how target groups are approached and why certain sampling strategies are deployed, how “Hong Kong families” are investigated, therefore, deserves closer scrutiny.

In addressing these limitations, this chapter will focus solely on mainland Chinese migrant families in Hong Kong (hereafter “migrant families”). These families are characterised by at least one parent or child who was born in the mainland and who emigrated into Hong Kong for reasons of family reunion. The length of resettlement was less than seven years during the period of research.<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws on my extensive review of literature about the migrant families—ranging from governmental reports, research by the non-governmental organisations, journal articles to Master’s and PhD dissertations—from the early 1980s to mid-2000s. My research objectives are to unfold how these families are conceptualised, what units of analysis have been used and what research methods have been deployed.

I will make three arguments in this chapter. Firstly, I will suggest a shift of thinking about how migrant families have been understood over the past three decades. The dominant social

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<sup>1</sup> These parameters fit into the Hong Kong government’s definition of new arrivals from Mainland China, and they are used in most research by local NGOs and scholars.

adjustment agenda and the human capital- and information-deficit models in the 1980s and early 1990s have been under challenge by three emerging perspectives in the late 1990s. They are rights-based citizenship, gender and empowerment and social capital building. Secondly, I will show that the unit of analysis is also changing. On the one hand, the heterogeneous needs of different migrant groups, such as children, teenagers and married female migrants, are more specifically targeted. On the other, family, as an intact and harmonious entity, has been questioned by the rising interest in the power dynamics within families between gender and across generations. Research has become more area-specific and now pays more attention to the influence of locality. Thirdly, I will illustrate with examples that research methodology in investigating migrant families has become more diverse and complex. In challenging the influential positivistic and quantitative research, an increasing amount of research has been conducted in terms of ethnography, participatory action research, longitudinal study and discourse analysis. New qualitative research methods, such as drawing, diary taking, “photovoice” and workshops, have been attempted to engage the migrants and to explore the multiple realities of their everyday lives in the host society. Triangulating quantitative and qualitative data and deploying different sampling methods to reach less-accessible migrants are also a few new trends.

This chapter will explain that these changing perspectives and methodologies in conceptualising migrant families are affected by both domestic conditions and international situations. The increasing dissatisfaction with the government’s assimilation policies, the rising discrimination against new arrivals and the politicalisation of the welfare and migrant issues have forced local academics and NGOs to re-examine the “social adjustment” agenda. The emergence of competing ontologies in the international academic world, such as social constructionism and postmodernism, in response to new social challenges in the 1960s and 1970s, has offered alternatives to research methodologies and methods. I will argue in this chapter that these changing

perspectives have significant implications on policy making and service delivery. While some NGOs take a more political stance to strive for migrants’ full citizenship, the government has initiated social capital building programmes to foster community trust and networks. New strategies, such as mentor systems, are also introduced to reach previously marginalised migrants.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: it adopts a historical approach and traces the changing conceptualisation of migrant families at three stages: the 1980s, the early and mid-1990s, and the late 1990s and mid-2000s. It will then discuss the diversity and complexity of research methodology and methods in approaching the families. The chapter will conclude by highlighting the policy implications and significance of these changes whilst suggesting a few limitations of this study.

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## Changing Perspectives

Research on mainland Chinese migrant families in Hong Kong can be roughly divided into three stages: the 1980s, the early and mid-1990s, and the late 1990s and mid-2000s. The temporal analysis will show the changes of migrant research from being apolitical to political in nature; from viewing migrants as a homogeneous entity to diverse and competing groups; from moving away from the social adjustment agenda to multiple concerns, such as rights and empowerment, and from solely quantitative methods to a wide range of qualitative and participatory tools.

### 1980s: One-Way Permit Quota System and Social Adjustment Policies

The British and Chinese governments agreed to replace the “touch-base” policy with the “one-way permit quota system” (OWP) in 1983. This scheme was devised to facilitate families with immediate members (spouses and children) residing on the mainland to be reunited in Hong Kong. This scheme was operated by the mainland authorities which governed the exit of mainlanders

to Hong Kong for settlement (Task Force on Population Policy 2003). This practice helped change the nature of Chinese migrants settling in Hong Kong. In 1981, 58% of immigrants were male and 42% female, but by 1991, the proportion of males dropped to 39% while the females rose to 61%. The numbers of children settled in Hong Kong increased too, rising from 30% to 40% of the total influx (Lin 1998).

The colonial government maintained its minimal interventionist policy towards Chinese migrants. It believed that mainland migrants would easily be assimilated into the Hong Kong mainstream society since they were Chinese and they had family members in Hong Kong. This “social adjustment” agenda was echoed with the study by Hong Kong Council of Social Service in 1985. This quantitative research identified the social, economic and psychological problems faced by the migrants in the adaptation process and highlighted the urgent needs of migrants in four aspects: housing, medical, employment and education.

The study was a landmark in Chinese migrant research. It was credited for taking a holistic perspective on migrant issues. It had tremendous influence on subsequent research in the early 1990s. That said, it has been criticised for narrowly defined migrant issues as merely adjustment problems. It, Lee (1997) argues, indirectly supported the colonial government’s technical-residual welfare model. This model places emphasis on incrementalism—social welfare should not affect the free economy and undermine individual work incentives. The colonial policy was to “maintain the Chinese tradition” which treated poverty as a personal matter which

should be dealt with within the family system (Lee and Edwards 1998, p. 27). Underpinning this model also lies the value of economic rationality that welfare expenditures should fall within the confines of economic growth.

### Early 1990s–Mid-1990s: Split Family Phenomenon

The daily quota for one-way permit was 75 in 1983, but it increased to 105 in 1993 and 150 in 1995. From 1983 to 2001, there were a total of 725,000 new arrivals admitted under the OWP scheme, which was 10.8% of the population of 6.72 million in 2001. From 1997 to 2001, mainland new arrivals under this scheme were equivalent to 93% of the population growth in the host society (SOCO 2003).

The negative impact of the quota system gradually emerged in the early 1990s. Because of the quota, children and spouses are separated under the one-way permit scheme, and the discrepancy in the times of arrival in Hong Kong between mainland children and their parents gave rise to separated families. Table 37.1 shows that 94.5% of couples were separated between Hong Kong and China for more than 10 years in 1998 in Guangdong province.

This has caused great disruption to the lives of the migrant families. Men in Hong Kong have to look after their young children because their wives remain in China. Young children are left on their own at home during the day in situations where their fathers hold on to a full-time job. On other occasions, female migrants join their husbands before their children, so they leave children

**Table 37.1** The length of separation between married couples under the one-way permit scheme

Year	Guangdong province			Other provinces		
	Separated more than 10 years (%)	Separated less than 10 years (%)	Total number	Separated more than 10 years (%)	Separated less than 10 years (%)	Total number
1998	94.5	5.5	17,587	8.9	91.1	1,924
1999	95.0	5.0	17,286	3.0	97.0	4,892
2000	66.8	33.2	19,365	3.4	96.6	6,078
2001	27.4	72.6	9,417	6.4	93.6	8,626

Source: Task force on population policy (2003, p. 54)

in the care of grandparents or other relatives in the mainland. This immigration policy has been accused of encouraging smuggling and corruption. Wang and Wong (1999) show their concern that many children and mainland wives, including some who were advanced in their pregnancy, risk their lives by placing themselves in the hands of “snake-heads” who smuggle them in for a high price. They are also in debt since they paid corrupt Chinese officials in order to jump the queue.

While a few NGOs started challenging the quota system and urging the Chinese government to reduce the years of separation on humanitarian grounds, migrant studies in Hong Kong in this period remained preoccupied with the adjustment agenda. Research by YMCA (1995), Chan (1996), the Boys’ and Girls’ Club Association of Hong Kong (1996) and Sham Shui Po District Council (1997) all placed emphasis on the adjustment problems in schools among young new arrivals. The study by YMCA, for instance, pointed out the difficulties of young migrants in finding schools, the big age gap between migrants and their fellow students, their poor performance in English subjects, and the psychological impact associated with the admission to lower forms. Research also looked into the problems faced by female migrants (e.g. Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centre 1999). Emphasis was placed on their psychological adaptation and help-seeking patterns. The solutions, these studies recommend, were to enhance the existing adjustment programmes and to improve access to social services.

While these studies are appreciated for acknowledging the different needs of the young and the middle-aged migrants, they have been criticised for being uncritical about the underlying assumptions of the information-deficit model. The model asserts that migrants lack sufficient knowledge about social services and providing them with more information is effective in breaking the barriers. Adjustment, from this perspective, is merely a matter of time. In addition, migrants are sometimes to blame for prolonging the adjustment problems. On separate occasions, YMCA (1995), the Boys’ and Girls’ Club Association of Hong Kong (1996) and the

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Kwun Tong Integrated Service Centre (2000) pinpointed that migrants were too passive and reluctant to use existing social services:

New immigrants have little understanding of Hong Kong before their migration, and adjusting to all aspects of life immediately after their arrival is not a simple task ... Very often, their problems were not being tackled immediately due to their *ignorance on community resources*. Furthermore, their *low eagerness* in seeking help has created even more difficulties to their adjustment of new life (p. 22, my emphasis).

Surveys suggest that the median family incomes amongst Chinese migrants were only 40% of that of their local counterparts (HKSAR 1998). In explaining the income gaps, the human capital-deficit model was often cited to “justify” the earning differential between established residents and new arrivals. Study by Lam and Liu (1993) suggests that, as the manufacturing sector shrinks and the service sector expands in Hong Kong, more domestic-specific human capital is required of the workers. A large portion of the human capital of immigrants acquired outside Hong Kong renders no economic value in production in the host society. In response to the challenges, the government attempted to strengthen family relationships by subsidising the integrated family service for new arrivals. Family development programmes, such as family adjustment courses, childcare services and women’s groups, were introduced. Orientation programmes, for example, community orientation tours, were intended to facilitate the integration of the new arrivals into the society. Employee-retraining schemes were also promoted to assist migrants’ entry into the labour market.

### **Late 1990s to Mid-2000s: Politicising “Migrant Problem”**

The worsening poverty situation, the rising discrimination against migrants, the reduction of welfare benefits and the controversial reinterpretation of the Basic Laws in the late 1990s have forced a few social workers and academics to



rethink not only the effectiveness of the government's assimilation policies but also social work practices.

The Gini coefficient, an indicator to measure income inequalities, has been persistently rising. It hit a record high at 0.533 in 2007 (Ming Pao 2007). The Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) explains that the forces of globalisation and economic restructuring, the economic recession after the Asian Financial Crisis and the government's residual welfare model are the causes of social polarisation—the development of financial activities has created a high-income managerial and professional middle class with high-consuming power while the diminishing manufacturing industries and the growth of service industries have put manual workers into a low-wage labour market.

While the poor working class families as a whole suffered from economic downturn, the government cut the welfare support to Chinese migrants in order to reduce heavy financial deficits during the economic recession in 1998. The government imposed strict restrictions on their eligibility for social welfare benefits. Increasing the number of years of residence in Hong Kong to seven years as an additional criterion for applications resulted in poor newly arrived migrants becoming no longer entitled to benefits. Apparently, at least 10% of the 54,000 newcomers are affected by this change each year (Ming Pao 2004).

NGOs reacted strongly to this “anti-migrant” measure, especially when the rising discrimination against new arrivals had caused deep concern. A survey by the Hong Kong Psychological Society (1997) showed that local residents tended to believe that Chinese migrants were “bad” in nature. Fifty-four percent of respondents thought migrants brought bad influences to Hong Kong, and 55% believed that migrants were themselves to be blamed for their poverty. While this anti-migrant sentiment can be linked to the rising Hong Kong indigenous identity resulted from the 1997 Question (Wang and Wong 1999), Lee (1997) argues that this atmosphere is unfavourable to assimilation because this provides “a social foundation for the exclusion of new

immigrants” when more and more Hong Kong people are concerned with the protection of their own territorial rights (p. 3, personal memo). The reduction of migrants' social benefits will further victimise the migrants by perpetuating the general prejudice that migrants are a financial burden on the host society and thus do not deserve assistance.

Some Legislative Councillors repeatedly urged the government to set up a Commission on New Arrivals and establish a Reception Centre for New Arrivals, but the government rejected the suggestions, claiming that migrants speak the same language and share a common origin and history with Hong Kong people (Paper for the LegCo Home Affairs Panel Meeting, 20 December 1995). The notion of sharing culture and values, however, caused uneasiness. Fung and Hung (1999), for example, suggest that “social workers have paid too little attention to their unique situation and the emphasis of existing social services has been mainly on the aspect of social adjustment” (p. 53). The Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) also points out that social adjustment is a “value-laden” concept, implying that migrants' assimilation into the host society is “normal and rational” (p. 3). The power inequalities between social workers and migrants, some academics warned, would create further dependency.

The politicalisation of the migrant issues has reached an explosive level in the case of the right of abode. Before the handover, the British and Chinese governments agreed that mainland children who were born of Hong Kong parents would automatically get the right of abode in Hong Kong after 1997. The Hong Kong government was worried about an influx of a large number of mainland children to Hong Kong after the handover, so it passed the Right of Abode Ordinance to fill the “loophole” in June 1997. It sets three criteria: first, only children born at the time that one of the parents became Hong Kong permanent residents enjoy right of abode in Hong Kong; second, children born out of wedlock do not have right of abodes; and third, children adopted out of Hong Kong do not enjoy the same right. Human rights activists and legal experts questioned the

change of law and initiated legal action to seek clarification in the courts. In January 1999, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal ruled that the Immigration Ordinance violated the Basic Law and right of abode should not be restricted by the time of the birth of the child.

The government claimed that the estimated number of first and second generation of mainland children eligible to enter Hong Kong according to the ruling of the Court of Final Appeal was 1.67 million. It also claimed that the government needed HK \$710 billion to help the newcomers. Although these figures were heavily criticised by scholars, the general public panicked and supported the government by asking the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) in Beijing to reinterpret the Basic Law. In June 1999, NPCSC overturned the ruling of the Court of Final Appeal, deciding that, in cases where at least one of the parents of these mainland children had obtained permanent resident status by birth or residence at the time of birth of the children, they had to stay in China to wait for the one-way permit to Hong Kong. The row about the right of abode later led to an arson attack on the Immigration Department in 2000 which caused several deaths of immigration officers and the arrest of a number of mainland migrants. The relationships between migrants and the locals, according to the Society for Community Organisation (2001), hit rock bottom.

### Three Emerging Perspectives

In response to the rapid sociopolitical transformations, research on Chinese migrants has become more diverse and dynamic. Three main perspectives have gradually emerged in the late 1990s and mid-2000s. They are rights-based citizenship, gender and empowerment, and social capital building. It needs to be stressed that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and the later sections will show that the rising sensitivity to gender, for example, can also be found in the citizenship and social capital perspectives. The

backgrounds and the nature of these perspectives are summarised in Table 37.2.

### Rights-Based Citizenship

Migrants from the mainland are often considered as “victims”, “deserving poor” and “dangerous objects” in the media. According to Lan (2003), this reflects “the underlying racist, sexist and classist bias of the Hong Kong society as part of an ethnic project against mainlanders” (abstract page). Although migrants are not generally regarded as “racially” distinct from local people, Sautman (2004) warns that many of them considered the new arrivals as “a notch lower on the SAR ethnic hierarchy” (p. 125).

The lower social status that migrants “enjoy”, Chan et al. (1999) explain, relates to the hegemony of economic rationality. Notions, such as citizen rights and social equalities, are often side-stepped in Hong Kong society. Since residency rights are often linked to economic values, Leung (2004) points out, the SAR government is successfully “turning the human beings living or seeking to live in Hong Kong back into workers” (p. 110). While foreign elites are welcome to work and live in Hong Kong and their spouses and children can automatically enjoy full residency rights, mainland migrants struggle to prove their usefulness to the society.

In challenging migrants’ second-class status, some social activists and academics believe that the solution is to secure migrants’ full citizenship. This resonates with Sautman’s idea that the marginalised should enjoy “equal access to the full spectrum of political rights and the attainment of those other rights that pre-condition a voice in the ordering of a democracy that permeates everyday life” (Sautman 2004, pp. 133–134). Ku and Pun’s book, “Remaking Citizenship in Hong Kong” (2004), has provided a significant theoretical foundation for citizenship in the Hong Kong context. It states that

The notions of participation, rights, membership, belonging, and difference are no longer abstract formal concepts but sites of intense contestation ...

**Table 37.2** Changing perspectives to conceptualising Chinese migrants in Hong Kong

Periods	Sociopolitical contexts	Research perspectives	Key research
1980s	One-way permit quota system introduced; 75 Mainland migrants allowed to settle in Hong Kong every day	<b>Social adjustment agenda and assimilation policies dominant</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Migrants are assumed to share similar cultural and social values with the host society</li> <li>– Adjustment is seen as a matter of time</li> <li>– Migrants require special assistance, such as housing and schooling</li> </ul>	Hong Kong Council of Social Service (1985)
Early to mid-1990s	Daily number of migrants to Hong Kong increased to 105 in 1993 and to 150 in 1995 Split family phenomenon caused concern	<b>Idea of assimilation and social adjustment remain influential</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– More focus on different needs of female migrants and young migrants in adjustment</li> <li>– Human capital-deficit and information-deficit models prevail in explaining migrant problems and earning differential</li> </ul>	YMCA (1995), Chan (1996), Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre (1999)
Late 1990s and mid-2000s	Rising discrimination against migrants Rising poverty due to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998 and the outbreak of SARS virus Politicising welfare and migrant issues Reinterpretation of the Basic Laws by the National People's Congress Standing Committee in 1999 Arson attack on the Immigration Department in 2000, causing several deaths of immigration officers and the imprisonment of a few migrants	<b>(1) Rights-based citizenship</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Challenge social adjustment agenda and hegemony of economic rationality</li> <li>– Strive for migrants' full social and political citizenship</li> <li>– Advocate for legislating anti-discrimination laws on grounds of ethnicity and gender to protect migrants</li> </ul> <b>(2) Gender and empowerment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Migrants, especially female, are constrained by patriarchal and other social institutions, such as “good mother” discourse</li> <li>– Deconstruct migrant “families” and look into power and resource distribution within families and between generations</li> <li>– Tackle gender inequalities by empowerment and raising consciousness by group participation</li> </ul> <b>(3) Social capital building</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concerned with weakening social bonding, trust and norms of reciprocity</li> <li>– Government promotes “Community Investment and Inclusion Fund”</li> <li>– Programmes introduced to help migrants build networks and trust by group participation</li> </ul>	SOCO (2003), Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999)  Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project (2005), Chun (2005)  Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (2002), Choi (2001), Wong (2007)

*Source:* Own research

Citizenship is understood also as a lived practise by which agency, subjectivity and embodied struggles from below expand the space of participation and resistance. By engaging with concrete and everyday experiences, we highlight the notion of a lived citizenship that unfolds the subjective experiences of social exclusions along the lines of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and that contests and negotiates the meaning of state power, rights, laws and social participation (pp. 12–13).

SOCO (2003) and the Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) are the two most active NGOs in this aspect. In helping migrants to secure full social and political citizenship, they believe that legislation and raising migrants' awareness are paramount. They argue that social discrimination against migrants has prohibited the new arrivals from "integrating" into society and from seeking employment. The government should, therefore, create legislation to combat ethnic and gender discrimination. The government should also provide training programmes for migrants, so that they fully understand their rights to employment, participating in trade unions and collective negotiation. They also argue that the government should respect the International Human Rights Acts and acknowledge migrants' rights to housing, education and family reunion.

Wong's ethnographic research (2007) illustrates how NGOs deploy the notions of "rights" differently to help migrants secure access to resources. In his case studies, three NGO groups adopted different approaches to advocating rights. The female-only neighbourhood group in Mongkok stressed migrants' rights (also known as "ethnic citizenship"), highlighting their status and needs as new arrivals in the host society and their demands for extra help. The against-family-violence supporting group in Tsuen Wan, in contrast, focused on the migrants' Hong Kong citizen rights, suggesting that the migrants should enjoy the full rights and responsibilities granted by the Basic Law, as the Hong Kong born did. The mutual help community-currency group in Wanchai adopted a mixed approach, celebrating both migrants' ethnic status and Hong Kong citizenship. It considered these two identities as

compatible and useful in maximising migrants' control over social and political resources. Acknowledging the significance of securing migrants' rights, Wong warns that, without fully understanding migrants' subjectivities and everyday interactions, the explicit promotion of rights can have negative impact on their livelihoods. Overemphasising migrants' citizen rights, for instance, can make migrants deprived of special rights that new arrivals can enjoy. Claiming dual rights maximises migrants' access to resources, but not all migrants feel comfortable with their mixed identities. Visible collective action may also risk damaging their community reputation and social networks (p. 177).

## Gender and Empowerment

The gender-sensitive perspective calls for the deconstruction of migrant "families" and challenges the mainstream assumption that migrant families are a homogeneous entity. It advocates a micro-approach to understand how resource and power are distributed within the families, and how gender roles are produced and reproduced in their neighbourhood.

The gender approach places emphasis on migrants' lived experiences and the negotiation between their private lives and participation in public sphere. It highlights the hierarchical power relationships based on generation, age and identity (Choi 2001). For example, in his research on female migrants' cross-border marriage, He (2006) underlines the fact that the gender perspective enables him to examine the subjective experiences of Chinese immigrant women through their journey of marriage and migration. Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre (1999) conducted a qualitative study, exploring the complex motivations about why mainland women were willing to marry Hong Kong men. This study challenges the mainstream perception that mainland women use marriage to secure financial stability. Instead, it underlines the social norms and institutions, such as age and parents' wishes, in shaping their decisions.

Gender studies can be separated from feminism, but the gender perspective to migrant research in Hong Kong often shows an “integration of a feminist perspective” (Ho 2006, p. 98) because female migrants are considered as being suppressed by the patriarchal structures. A study by Hoi and Chan (2006) shows that female migrants tend to suffer from family violence because they have been constrained by the “good wives” discourse. Being a good wife, they should place the interests of their families, husbands and children above their own. A female interviewee in their case study admitted that she had been physically attacked by her husband and her son. She internalised the violence by suggesting that her son imitated his father’s violent behaviour and believed that violence is the only way to resolve problems (p. 118). Fung and Hung (1999) explain that power inequalities within migrant families result in female migrants’ lack of financial abilities and over-reliance on their husbands, which place them in a position of subordination.

The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (1998) interviewed 2,210 women to compare and contrast the perception of social status between local and migrant women. Table 37.3 shows that female migrants tend to agree that their career achievement should not be higher than that of their husbands, and also shows their preference for male children to female in order

to gain social status. The traditional gendered stereotypes come along with low self-esteem among the female migrants. A study by the Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centre (1999) discovers that female mainlanders have lower self-esteem and higher expectations of marriage. They also lack sufficient skills in emotion management and support networks.

Findings such as these have caused alarm about the vulnerability of female migrants in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (1998) suggests that migrant wives’ over-reliance on their husbands causes problems, arguing that their husbands may not be a “good” guide for their new environment and that external assistance is necessary. Fung and Hung (1999) claim that it is men, specifically the husbands of migrants, who are responsible for the existing gender inequalities. They suggest that women’s lack of financial independence is the root cause of their subordinate position, both before and after their arrival in Hong Kong. Their husbands have the absolute power to manipulate the relationships.

This school of thought is particularly critical to the government’s adjustment policies and employment strategies. The government is criticised for reinforcing women’s roles as mothers and wives at home on the one hand and encouraging female migrants to participate in the labour market on the other. Ho (2006) argues that increasing female participation in the labour market does not automatically raise their social status at home and in society since martial hierarchy and male dominance in the labour market have not been tackled. Their increasing financial contributions can only enhance marital tension and their workload at home. As a result, some migrant women may “prefer[s] to return to the position of subordination if their husbands were able to take up the breadwinner role” (p. 237).

There is, however, a danger in narrowing down gender to women issues and mistakenly making a dichotomy between “men as oppressors” and “women as victims”. The gender issues around Chinese migrants in Hong Kong are far more complex. The role of masculinity, fatherhood and men’s perceptions of childcare is important in

**Table 37.3** Comparing perception of social status between local and migrant women

Statements	Agree (%)	
	Local women	Migrant women
1. Wives’ career achievement should not be higher than their husbands	20.4	37.6
2. Women receive respect from their family and relations only if they have male children	14.2	30.2
3. Wives can reject their husbands’ demand for sex	76.5	47.2

Source: The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (1998, p. 26)



understanding gender interactions within families. Choi (2001) shows that the rivalry between female migrants and their mothers-in-law can have negative impact on their well-being. Wong (2001) conducted a qualitative study, interviewing nine men who married women in the mainland. He finds that men felt useless if they had to stay home to look after their young children when their wives were away. Apart from gender relationships within families, research by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association touches upon the gendered living space in migrants' neighbourhoods (2004). It highlights the fact that female migrants are more likely to suffer from sexual harassment because of multiple tenure and overcrowding.

The solution to gender inequalities, the Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project (2005) and Chun (2005) propose, is empowerment through group participation. The Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project defines empowerment as a "process which helps individuals, groups and community foster a sense of confidence through participation" (p. 4). Chun highlights three dimensions of empowerment: psychological empowerment, empowerment at group level and empowerment at the community level. The first level of empowerment is related to self-confidence and a sense of control and competence. The second level stresses social network building and mutual support from the groups. The third dimension highlights the liaison between organisations and share of resources to support one another. Comparing female migrants' interpersonal skills and confidence in communication before and after group participation, Chun has portrayed a rather rosy picture about the positive correlation between public involvement and empowerment. She, however, plays down the downside of empowerment that may have negative impact on their lives.

## Social Capital Building

Social capital is generally regarded as resources generated from social interactions (Edwards

2004). It is measured by quality and density of social networks, norms of reciprocity and levels of social and public trust.<sup>2</sup> Ng and Hils (2000) suggest that Hong Kong society as a whole seems to fit into the "social capital lost" story. They use the term "dwindling social capital" to describe the situation:

Hong Kong society, as a whole, seems to fit into the "social capital lost" story which shows a picture of collapse of trust and reciprocity. Increasing divorce, accelerating family disintegration and an increasingly individualised society are blamed for the problems (p. 24).

The study on social capital by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (2002) also illustrates a grim picture: nearly 80% of respondents have not involved themselves in community-related activities, and 64% suggest that not even one neighbour can be trusted. This report makes an alarming conclusion: weakening social networks will create strong reliance on the government in the long run (p. 99). Wong (2004) conducted a social capital survey and asked 1,502 households three questions: (1) How many relatives can lend you money? (2) How many relatives can introduce you to a job? (3) How many relatives can you trust? His research finds that poor groups have significantly lower social capital than non-poor groups. This study covers all poor people in a generic term, but the findings have significant implications on poor mainland migrants in Hong Kong.

In his 2001 policy address, the Chief Executive of the Special Administration Region of Hong Kong declared the setting up of a HK\$300 million "Community Investment and Inclusion Fund". It aims to:

<sup>2</sup> Another approach to social capital is social network theory. Ronald Burt (2001) and Nan Lin (2001) suggest that network characteristics, relations and locations are the key elements in determining the access to, and use of, social capital. This perspective represents the 'minimalist view of social capital' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003, p. xxvii) which focuses on network features and plays down other forms of social capital, such as trust and institutions. Biggart and Beamish (2003) challenge this approach for structural determination without paying enough attention to 'the realm of meaning, interpretation and individual agency' (p. 450).

promote community participation, mutual assistance, support and social inclusion provided through strengthened community network in the community. This will in turn help reinforce the sense of belonging in the community, enhance the social networks of individuals and families, broaden the support base available to assist them to resolve their problems and address common concerns. These community networks, strengthened relations, sense of belonging, and willingness to provide mutual aid form the foundation of social capital (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2002, p. 4).

As a matter of fact, researchers have used the concept of social networking in the 1990s to examine migrants' help-seeking patterns. For example, Tong (1998) explores social networking and psychological support between female new arrivals in migrants' groups. Nevertheless, an increasing number of academics embrace the notion of social capital because it means more than social networks and touches on other social elements, such as trust, reciprocity and participation. Tang (2002), for instance, examines the social capital formation of new-arrival students. He finds that social capital among migrant children is not evenly distributed, and the differences lie in "their family and ethnic background" (p. 147). Wong (2007) uses social capital to capture the fluidity of migrants' associational lives. A female migrant in one of his case studies actively participates in various "modern" and "traditional" types of institutions: migrant group and clan association, church and temple, supermarket, and local fish and meat market. Her involvements in multiple institutions underscore the constant negotiation of time and space but are often constrained by poverty and social discrimination (pp. 133–137).

Choi (2001) examines female migrants' social capital building in two clan associations in Hong Kong. She finds that: "Chaozhou women who migrated to Hong Kong before the 1970s seem to have found their integration a less painful process compared with those who arrived in the 1990s ... many new migrants arriving after the 1990s have been settled by the government in new towns where a coherent ethnic community is absent" (pp. 293–294). Social capital also highlights the significance of public engagement and "bridging" social capital in fostering trust in divisive

communities. The Boys' and Girls' Club Association of Hong Kong (2001) and Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council (1998) use games and activities to enhance mutual understanding between young new arrivals and local people, but the effectiveness of the policies has not been properly analysed.

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## Changing Units of Analysis

The changing perspectives come along with a re-examination of the unit of analysis in researching the migrants. One of the changes is to break the myth that migrants are a homogeneous group and to shed light on the heterogeneous needs and interests. Another change is to view migrant families as a contentious place, where resources and power are constantly competing and negotiating between gender and across generations, rather than as a harmonious entity.

To be fair, migrants have already been treated as a heterogeneous group in the early and mid-1990s. The psychological adaptation and social needs of the new-arrival children and the middle-aged women, for example, were researched separately. However, migrants have been deconstructed in a more complex manner since the late 1990s. Instead of targeting the "usual suspects", such as children, teenagers, young adults and housewives, Lam and Song (2002) deliberately focus on migrants who gained places at universities in Hong Kong. They explain that researchers tend to focus on the less-advantageous migrants and the successful ones are "rarely researched and reported" (p. 206). Ho (2006) sheds light on heterogeneity and complexity by breaking migrant couples into four types according to economics roles. They are traditional couples, dual-earner couples, working wives and non-productive husbands and families on welfare (p. 260). She examines how these different migrant couples make decisions in their everyday lives. Wong (2008) differentiates migrants by their identities and rural/urban backgrounds (see Table 37.4). The first group considered themselves as mainland Chinese with a strong rural identity. The second group has a strong Hong

**Table 37.4** Discrimination amongst Chinese migrants

1. **Chinese/rural identity** mainly came from rural areas; skins are darker and accent stronger. Age gaps between them and their husbands and children are wide. Owing to their social backgrounds and physical characteristics, they encounter difficulties in hiding their migrant identity or switching their identity from one to the other
2. **Hong Kong/urban identity** may be as poor as the first group, but their city and urban background before migration makes them believe that they are superior to the first group. They have a stronger Hong Kong identity and thus accuse the first group of bringing shame to migrants as a whole because of their reliance on social benefits and lack of education
3. **Hong Kong–Chinese/urban identity** is mainly “coping poor”. Families are more intact, husbands have stable jobs and they do not need to rely on social benefits. They also have more knowledge and resources, so they use their identities flexibly in different circumstances

*Source:* My work

Kong, urban identity, and it tends to discriminate against the first group because they are largely illiterate and rely on social benefits. The third group possesses hybrid identities, and members view themselves as both mainlanders and Hongkongers. The significance of this research is that discrimination against migrants can come from migrants themselves. Merely improving the relationships between the migrants and local people is, therefore, inadequate and ineffective in combating discrimination.

While migrants’ general needs, such as psychological needs, school performance and social networking patterns, were the research focus in the early and mid-1990s, their specific needs and concerns have received attention in the late 1990s. For instance, reports suggest that an increasing number of teenagers in Wong Tai Sin have used drugs. In order to examine if this trend has influenced the teenage migrants, Wong Tai Sin Integrated Service for Young People (1999) conducted a special study on young new arrivals’ attitudes towards drugs. This study suggests that while the majority of young migrants have not experienced drugs, they have very limited knowledge about them.

Research on migrants has long been area-specific, because most studies are sponsored by the NGOs and the sponsors want to know how migrants behave in their own areas. Research showing its interest in area specificity in the late 1990s and early 2000s has, however, different reasons. It pays more attention to the influence of locality because the physical environments play a significant role in migrants’

everyday lives. For example, He (2006) conducted a longitudinal study on cross-border movement among female migrants. He purposively selected migrants living in Sheung Shui because he argues that Sheung Shui is close to the border and these migrants are more intense in their cross-border interactions.

The unit of analysis has also moved away from the ideal that a migrant family is an intact and harmonious entity. Instead, the gender perspective deconstructs “families” and calls for a micro-approach to look into the tension and conflict within families and to examine power dynamics and resource distribution between gender and across generations over time and space. Research by Choi (2001) is a good example.

## Changing Methodologies

New perspectives need different research methodologies, methods and sampling strategies to tell and investigate migrants’ stories. Since the emerging perspectives, mentioned earlier in the section “Changing units of analysis”, are characterised as anti-positivist, dynamic and power-sensitive, the methodologies have to meet a number of criteria. Firstly, they believe that knowledge is co-constructed between stakeholders. Secondly, they aim to give power back to the marginalised and use the research methods to voice their concerns. Thirdly, they focus on process and context, rather than problem and outcome. Lastly, they celebrate “thick description” and embrace “value involvement” (Flick 2006).

Four key methodologies have gradually emerged in assisting the development of the perspectives in the late 1990s and mid-2000s. They are ethnography, participatory action research, longitudinal qualitative study and discourse analysis. Table 37.5 provides a summary of the characteristics of each methodology.

Ethnography is defined as “the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting” (Brewer 2000, p. 6). Methods of data collection, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews and personal documents, are commonly used in ethnography. Tang (2002) and Lan (2003) both adopt ethnography in understanding different groups of migrants. Tang uses observations and interviews to capture how social capital shapes new-arrival students’ school performance and adaptation to new environment. Lan’s research touches upon the less-accessible migrant sex workers in Hong Kong. She uses her position as

a part-time interpreter for the police and immigration department to conduct a covert study. By talking to 400 mainland sex workers and two pimps and through participant observations, she aims to “light the unheard of voices of mainland migrant sex workers” and to “unwrap[s] the complexity of experience and resistance” (abstract page).

Participatory action research stresses that research is a learning process. It is intended to engage with participants and to empower them through games, exercises, activities and campaigns. It also inspires researchers to reflect critically on their own roles in the research process (Denscombe 2007). The Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong conducts a participatory action research on migrants’ perceptions on private and public space in 2004. A method called “photovoice” is deployed. Ten new-arrival women and their children in the project were entrusted with automatic cameras. They were asked to take pictures of their own living environment and their daily lives. They were required to explain the

**Table 37.5** Changing research methodologies

Methodological approaches	Assumptions	Methods	Common elements	Examples
(1) Ethnography	Study of people in the fields to capture social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting	Participant observation, interviews, stay in the field for a long period of time	Oral history, comparative studies, everyday lives, social practices, purposeful and snowball sampling strategies	Tang (2002), Lan (2003)
(2) Participatory action research	Research is a learning process, intended to engage with participants and demonstrate advocacy	Community map drawing, photovoice, diary writing, workshop		The Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs Association (2004)
(3) Longitudinal qualitative study	Trace the changes of migrants’ perceptions and subjectivities over a number of issues over time and space	Make several interviews and observations over a long period of time		He (2006), Wong (2007)
(4) Discourse analysis	Understand the mechanisms and power structures in constructing knowledge	Review newspapers and articles to conduct content examination		Lan (2003)

Source: Own research

places they liked and disliked. The project leaders suggest that the aim of this method is “not of counting things up but of drawing on the community’s active lore, observations and stories, in both visual and oral terms”. They find that it serves as “a powerful medium of expression for marginal groups who are not capable of using authoritative means of presentation and expression such as writing” (p. 145). A visual simulation modelling workshop was also organised. By using models, the participants could express their opinions on the meaning of “democratic urban space” and their preferred living environment and neighbourhood (p. 144).

Longitudinal qualitative research traces the changes of migrants’ perceptions and subjectivities over a number of issues over time and space. He (2006) examines the first year of resettlement experience of 15 Chinese immigrant women who live in Sheung Shui. He visited the women four times a year and explored how their experiences of adjustment and gender relationships change over time. He finds that the interviewees responded differently at various stages of adaptation. Wong (2007) uses longitudinal study to explore how social capital is built, transformed and destroyed before, during and after migration to Hong Kong. He gives examples to show that migrants used strong and weak ties in different circumstances (pp. 110–111).

Discourse analysis is intended to understand the mechanisms and power structures in constructing “realities” (Norman and Yvonna 2005). In analysing how the media represent mainland migrant sex workers in Hong Kong, Lan (2003) adopted discourse analysis and searched for newspapers containing keywords, such as “prostitution” and “mainland prostitute” in Hong Kong newspapers from January 2000 to February 2003. Her study suggests that the sex workers are constructed as “victims”, “dangerous women” and “erotic objects” and that implies the underlying racist, sexist and classist bias of Hong Kong society as part of an ethnic project against “mainlanders” (abstract page).

## **Oral History, Comparative Studies, Everyday Lives and Snowball Sampling**

It is important to stress that these four methodological perspectives are mutually compatible. Most of them adopt case study and oral history approaches to understand the complexity of the migrant issues. Apart from talking to migrants, study by Leung and Lam (1999) uses the perspective of social activists to trace the development of the reinterpretation of the Basic Law in 1999. Father Kim, as one of the hunger strike participants, recorded his campaign in his diary from 5 February to 6 April in 1999.

Comparative research has also been popular in order to uncover the multiple realities of migrants’ lives in the host society. Tong (1998) compared and contrasted two self-help groups, the Caritas Community Centre in Tsuen Wan and the Society for Community Organisation. The former is inner-focused group which aims at personal development of members themselves while the latter focuses on pressure group activities and aims to bring about changes by influencing the government and the general public (p. 87). Tang intends to examine if different structures and arrangements within these organisations affect migrants’ associational lives.

Emphasising migrants’ everyday lives has also become the focus of migrant research. Wong (2007) argues that everyday cooperation by female migrants is generally not taken seriously by social workers because it does not fit into their ideal form of collective action as being visible and functional. A study by the Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre shows that female migrants carry out many collective activities with their friends when their children are in school (1999, p. 58). They go shopping together, chat in restaurants and visit their mutual friends. When their children are at home, they contact their friends by phone or send letters to their mainland relations. They sometimes take their children to nearby playgrounds, markets and schools where they meet friends. These activities may not necessarily be “functional”, but they are part of their collective lives. Lui and Wong (1998) therefore



argue that collective action is not necessarily “explosive and confrontational”. Migrants are involved in fluid communities and engaged in informal friendship networks, temporary groups and occasional gatherings. Individuals are not tied to only one community but may have multiple and overlapping bonds. The understanding of migrants’ daily interactions helps demonstrate that community and neighbourhood have different significance to different groups and the relations of cooperation change over time and space across migrants’ life course.

Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling strategies are common in the qualitative research. They challenge the positivist’s claim of scientific sampling methods. In contrast to probability sampling, this technique is not concerned with “estimating the probability of units being included in the sample” (Burgess 1984, p. 54). Ho (2006) adopts a purposeful sampling method in order to “insure the diversity of participants” background in terms of “age, educational level, class, migration experience, work experience, marital status and length of settlement” (p. 10). Also known as “chain referral”, “network” or “reputational” sampling, the snowball technique is characterised as taking advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to “provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts” (Atkinson and Flint 2001, p. 1). Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre (1999) asks female migrants to introduce their friends for interview. This aims to reach the less-visible migrants, especially those who do not participate in community groups.

It is crucial to stress that not all qualitative migrant researchers consider quantitative studies irrelevant to their research. A few adopt a mixed approach which combines quantitative and qualitative data. In order to unfold multiple discriminations against migrants in job seeking, renting, school placement and utilising social welfare, the Society for Community Organisation adopted a mixed approach (2001). It first selected 30 new immigrant families from the cases of its own organisation to form a focus group. It then surveyed 570 families and interviewed six to eight cases for deeper studies (p. 3). Choi (2001)

combines the quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine how social capital is produced and reproduced within two clan associations in Hong Kong.

There have been some changes of the sampling methods in the quantitative research over the past 25 years. Owing to the lack of a complete data set in the 1980s, researchers of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service had to distribute to every migrant a reservation card on which a number was written at the immigration control border. Those who got the number which matched with the computer’s random sampling number would be selected for interview (1985). The Home Office and the Statistical Department these days have complete data sets which enable quantitative researchers to deploy more sophisticated sampling methods to seek “scientific” representation.

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## Discussion and Policy Implications

The section on “Social Capital Building” has explained how domestic settings in Hong Kong, before and after the handover, have contributed to the emergence of the new perspectives. We should, however, not neglect new theoretical and methodological movements in the West in the 1960s and 1970s that play a significant role in triggering off the changes in Hong Kong.

Theoretically, the three perspectives stress the resilience by giving voice to migrants on the one hand and breaking the structural barriers that constrain them from securing full citizenship, enjoying gender equalities and building social capital on the other. This understanding of the interplay between migrants’ agency and structural forces is underpinned by Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory (1984), Mark Granovetter’s notion of social embeddedness (1992) and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (1977). Despite some differences among them, they tend to agree that it is a mistake to depict agency as either under-socialised or over-socialised. The former indicates the indeterminate nature of human actions and the capacity of individuals for willed and voluntary action which is not governed by social

structure. It strongly believes that individuals are transformative agents who can challenge structural inequalities. The latter, on the contrary, argues that individual actions are predetermined and constrained by social structures. It portrays agents as passive recipients who are incapable of resisting the structures surrounding them. The notion of agency–structure interactions helps to explore everyday social interactions which link individual agency and social structure.

The agency–structure perspective has far-reaching impact on researching migration worldwide. In analysing the global trend of migration from the developing countries' perspective, de Haan (1999) argues that we need to take account of migrants' agency and attitudes and the structures within which they live. Attention also needs to be paid to the historical patterns of migration and the cultural and political contexts in which migration takes place. In his words, we also need to look into their "motivations, attitudes and [their] understanding of the structures within which they act" (p. 12).

It is not hard to find examples of local migrant research to show the influence of this perspective. In his research on new-arrival students' adaptation and school performance, Tang (2002) makes his theoretical background explicit: "this study examines the interplay between structure (the culture, opportunity structure, and social networks of the host society) and agency (of the new arrival students) in the context of immigration adaptation" (pp. 145–146, original brackets). In order to demonstrate that the process of migration is not simply personal adjustment problems, He (2006) examines the painstaking process of negotiation and migrants' subjectivities in cross-border marriage. To avoid idealising migrants' agency, researchers are aware of the role of structural forces that shape migrants' everyday practices. The Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) highlights the fact that the so-called new-arrival problem, to a great extent, results from "a continuation of the weak bargaining positioning of the workers in Hong Kong as a whole" (p. 10). Some research is particularly interested in analysing the role of institutions in linking agency and structure. Institutions are generally defined as cultural values and social

practices. In their research, Hoi and Chan (2006) discuss how restrictive social norms help reconstruct the new arrivals' self.

The diverse and complex research methodologies also result from the emergence of different ontologies in the philosophy of social sciences in the USA and the UK in the 1960s and 1970s in an attempt to challenge positivism (Norman and Yvonna 2005). Social constructionism, feminism and postmodernism, to name a few, offer alternative perspectives to how knowledge is constructed. Social constructionism, stressing the co-production of knowledge between researchers and the researched, shapes Lan's (2003) ethnographic study on mainland migrant sex workers in Hong Kong. Postmodernism, celebrating diversity and deconstruction, influences Ho (2006) to break migrant couples down into different types according to their identity and economic roles.

The changing perspectives on migrant studies in Hong Kong have significant implications for how social services are delivered. Ho (2006) suggests:

It is important for social workers to appreciate the diversity among immigrant women ..... Each type of immigrant women presents their own risks and potentials. Social workers, in working with immigrant women, should identify their characteristics before devising intervention (p. 286).

Along with the campaigns for the change of legislation, SOCO (2003) runs workshops in order to raise migrants' awareness of their own rights. A few NGOs also realised that they were too "centre"-oriented which failed to attract migrants to use their services. More effective strategies, such as outreach and mentor systems, are then introduced to reach the less visible migrants (Au 1998).

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## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that research on mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong has become more diverse and complex over the past 25 years. The previously dominant thinking, such as the social adjustment agenda and the human capital-deficit model, has strongly been challenged

by perspectives such as rights-based citizenship, gender and empowerment, and social capital building, over the past 10 years. These new perspectives have enriched our understanding of how migrants' experiences, in the process of migration, are constructed and negotiated. Migrants are no longer treated as a homogeneous entity; instead, they are deconstructed as many social groups with different characteristics, needs, subjectivities and constraints. Research has become more sensitive to multiple realities of their lived experiences and everyday lives. The new perspectives also remind us not to take the migrant "families" for granted. Family is not necessarily a haven for migrants but a site of struggle and contestation (Ku and Pun 2004). Migrant research has become more sensitive to the influence of locality. New research methodologies, such as ethnography and participatory action, and new methods, such as photovoice and community map drawing, have been experimented with in order to engage and empower the migrants. The changing perspectives have brought some impact on social provision and delivery. Mentor systems, using migrants' own social networks to provide assistance to one another, have been introduced in a few NGOs.

This chapter has also argued that the changing perspectives are attributed to the sociopolitical transformation within Hong Kong and the theoretical and methodological development in the West. Structuration theory and social constructionism are two obvious examples that have a far-reaching impact on local migrant studies.

It is necessary to clarify a few points here. The highlight of the three perspectives is intended to draw attention to the different emphasis of the new research focus. This, however, does not mean that they are mutually exclusive, and the boundaries among them are clear-cut. Social capital studies, for example, consider both the role of gender and social networks in access to migrants' citizen rights (Wong 2008). It is also not the intention to create a false impression that the three new perspectives have now got the upper hand while the social adjustment agenda focus on

migrant families and quantitative approach to migrant studies has lost their influence. The fact, however, is not so clear. Ngau Tau Kok Caritas Community Centre (2001) sticks to the information-deficit model and produces booklets about the sources of social services for migrants. Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project (2005) still consider the "migrant family" as the focus of their service provision (p. 4). These examples show that the old and new perspectives are constantly competing. It is too early to judge which perspectives are more influential than the others.

There are also a few limitations of this study. A few NGO research studies are not explicit in their research methodologies. Most of the reports are written in Chinese, and there is a risk of "lost in translation". More and more research on Chinese migrants is conducted by documentaries and films. The Radio and Television of Hong Kong has, for instance, made a lot of current affairs programmes on the new arrivals. My study, however, has skipped video analysis because it requires special research training and it can be time-consuming.

Regarding the future direction of the migrant research in Hong Kong, I want to pinpoint four aspects. First of all, there is a lack of longitudinal research (both quantitative and qualitative) on migrants' lived experiences. He (2006) has offered a good example, but the length of his observations only lasted for 12 months. This is obviously inadequate for understanding how time and space affect migrants in the process of adaptation. The research funding bodies are advised to create a favourable environment by offering longer term research contracts, such as what the UK and the EU are implementing. Secondly, while ethnography has become more and more popular in migrant studies, researchers need to expand the sites of investigation. After obtaining consent from migrants, researchers can scrutinise migrants' private and public life and follow them to go back to their hometowns in the mainland. This enables us to observe social interactions with kin and friends and that is useful to analyse the dynamics of the cross-border exchange.

Thirdly, there is an increasing number of migrants from the second generation who are willing to serve their less well-off counterparts in NGOs. They came to Hong Kong for family reunion and have benefited from receiving higher education in Hong Kong. We, however, do not know a great deal about whether these highly educated, second-generation migrants can effectively represent the needs of poor migrants. Lastly, the current debate on gender and social capital tends to sidestep the role of children. This is related to an assumption that children are dependent and passive, and therefore, their agency is neglected. More research is needed to examine their “paradoxical” role—while their presence helps their parents to socialise with others in parks, schools and clan associations, they can have a negative impact on their parents’ social capital by refusing to return to China or participate in public events.

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# The One-Child Policy and Its Impact on Chinese Families

# 38

Barbara H. Settles, Xuewen Sheng, Yuan Zang,  
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Current birth planning (ji hua sheng yu) program of People's Republic of China, featured by the one-child-per-couple policy (the one-child policy), has been one of the largest and most dramatic population-control campaigns in the world, receiving both praise and sharp evaluation over the past quarter of a century. It has been so successfully implemented in China that the nation's population growth rate dropped significantly. This policy has been intensely criticized internationally for violating fundamental human rights evidenced by the forced sterilizations and abortions and the widespread abandonment and/or neglect of baby girls. As the policy has recently been extended through new legislation as the nation's demographic strategy in the future (Xin Hua News Agency 2001) and reaffirmed in 2008

(Yardley), we will highlight some of the major challenges confronting Chinese families in the twenty-first century as the consequence of this policy. Social policies and programs often work differently from their proposed goals and implementation. An overdetermined view of policy shifts may attribute all changed behavior and outcomes directly to policy and program inputs. A multiple set of variables and relationships may be needed to explain and account for both those outcomes that were anticipated and those that were not as expected. This chapter attempts to unbundle these concepts to suggest implications for policies and programs in future.

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## The Development and Implementation of One-Child Policy

The origin of one-child policy can be traced to the 1950s when the idea of birth control was introduced by a group of nonparty intellectuals. Professor Yinchu Ma (1957) prepared his famous book, *New Population Theory*, in response to the unchecked population growth resulting from the improvement of maternal and child health, the fall of mortality rates, and a Maoist government's ambivalent, but generally positive outlook on childbearing (Singer 1998; Greenhalgh 2003) during the early years of the new republic (White 1994). In meantime, Chinese leaders began to see the rapid population growth as a potential threat to the nation's economic development and food surplus (White 1994, 2006).

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At the end of the 1950s, the party chose to “propagandize and popularize” birth control in all densely populated areas and “promote child-birth according to plan,” which was followed in the 1960s by a propaganda campaign promoting late marriage and a two-child family under the slogan of “one is a good few, two is just enough, and three is over” (White 1994, 2006). The implementation of birth-control policy was gradually transferred from a voluntary-based birth planning program to a state-based control of population growth. Such political movements as the Anti-rightist, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution displaced these birth-control efforts until the 1970s when the nation’s population rose to some 250 million additional people (Ching and Penny 1999). Two steps were taken in promoting population control. The first step began with a “later, longer, fewer” campaign in the 1970, focusing on extending contraceptive and abortion services into the rural areas and on extensive promotion of later marriage, longer intervals between births, and smaller families. After five years the urban fertility rate fell to below 1.8% and below 4% for rural in 1975. Given that about half of the Chinese population was under the age of 21, further growth was inevitable even if each family was quite small (Festini and de Martino 2004; Hesketh et al. 2005). By the 1982 census, Chinese population climbed over one billion, and if the rapid growing trend persisted, there would be more than 1.4 billion people in China by the end of the century, which would threaten China’s ambitious goals of modernization. The one-child policy emerged in 1979 and was officially announced by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and State Council’s Resolution Concerning the Strengthening of Birth Control and Strictly Controlling Population Growth (1980):

The State advocates the one couple has only one child. Except for special cases, with approval for second birth, government officials, workers and urban residents can only have one child for each couple. In rural areas, the State also advocates that each couple has only one child. However, with approval, those who have real difficulties can have their second child, several years after the birth of the first. (p. 1)

The official goals in the 1980s were to reach zero growth and to keep the population at around 1.2 billion by the year 2000 (Hao 1988). People were encouraged to have only one child through financial and material incentives, such as paid pregnancy leave for up to three years, a 5–10% salary increase, and preferential access to housing, schools, and health services (Richards 1996; Ching and Penny 1999). Couples having a second child were excluded from these benefits and suffered penalties such as financial levies on each additional child and sanctions, which ranged from social pressure to curtailed career prospects in government jobs. Specific measures and implementation procedures varied from province to province (Feng and Hao 1992) and from time to time over the implementation process. Variation was not simply an urban–rural one or a Han versus minority phenomena (Short and Fengying 1998).

The policy caught the attention of the world, as it did upon the heels of a strong debate in the western world on whether it was indeed possible to change the expected population explosion in much of the developing world. Many scholars and policymakers at that time suggested that the population problem was not amenable to ordinary interventions and education. The Chinese government’s decision to mandate change and support the limitation of the one-child family with both incentives for complying and disincentives for noncompliance was coherent with what was being said by some international demographers and politicians. The view that population pressure was a likely crisis especially in Asia was widely held as a major fear for the future of world development and quality of life (Davis 1949, p. 602; Ehrlich 1968). PRC population science, which was first a social science program, was significantly affected by a natural science and systems engineering group that had “access to Western science, data, computers and political connections” (Greenhalgh 2003, p. 169). Visiting Europe in 1978, Song Jian, a leader in the group, was exposed to the work inspired by the Club of Rome, which featured both the concept of population explosion and applications of control theory to dealing with the crisis (Greenhalgh 2003,

p. 170). UNFPA, IPPF, and World Bank all supported efforts in China, and an opportunity was identified for using the Chinese program as a model (Mosher 2006).

While the one-child policy was stated as a voluntary-based birth-control program, it was implemented through a grassroot political mobilization and a set of strict administrative controls such as residential registration, certificate of birth approval, and birth certification (White 2006). Coercion in terms of sterilization, forced abortion, and sanctions in terms of housing and economics have been used and provided a major leverage for world criticism of the policy (Mosher 2006). The officials charged with implementing the policies were subject to punishments and rewards themselves. In general, urban couples were easier to persuade and control because most of them worked in state-owned enterprises where the political control and administrative forces were strong. Only under few exceptions may urban residents have a second birth. In Zhejiang province, a couple could have a second child if (1) the first child is a girl or has a defect, (2) one remarried partner had no child by the previous marriage, (3) they belonged to certain group of workers such as miners, or (4) both partners were themselves from one-child families (Hesketh and Zhu 1997; Short and Fengying 1998).

Rural families were more difficult to convince. Peasants, with limited savings and without government pensions, still needed children to support them in old age. As married daughters traditionally moved into their husbands' families' homes and lineage, a son was essential, and preferably more than one, for meeting the demands of labor on farms and related businesses. The stronger resistance from peasants included such strategies as evasion, collusion, cover-up, confrontation and violence (White 2006). In China's vast rural areas where the local social control was weakened by the collapse of the old commune system due to the post-Mao economic reform, local authorities were forced to rely on fines to discourage higher-order births. They turned to stringent birth-control campaigns, which in the policy's earlier years resulted in many women being bullied into

abortions and sterilization. Village-level family planning workers were caught between the state's demands and the determination of their friends and neighbors. Gradually villagers developed a process of negotiation and compromise (Greenhalgh 1992), which allowed a degree of flexibility within the policy. Through the combination of reward, persuasion, intimidation, and coercion, more than 25 million people were sterilized and the number of abortions and IUD insertions increased, resulting in a remarkable fall of birthrates from 21.1% in 1981 to 17.5% in 1984 (White 2006, p. 73). Since 1985, softening of policy and relaxing of requirements for second birth has occurred, although details of regulations varied from province to province. By 2001, a large majority of provinces relaxed the conditions for a second birth, if (1) the first child was a girl in rural areas (19 provinces), (2) the couple were only children (27 provinces), and (3) the only child was disabled (31 provinces) (Xin Hua News Agency 2001).

The one-child policy has been implemented mainly among Han, the largest nationality in the PRC. The 56 ethnic groups including Tibetan, inner Mongolian, Yi, Pumi, and Lusu, which are some 160 million people spread over a vast area of the PRC, were excluded from the policy to avoid the danger of the groups dying out and to reduce conflict with these minorities (People's Daily Online 2008). In an analysis of the Korean minority's participation in the one-child certificate program, Park and Han (1990) found that the acceptance of the certificate was low in comparison to the Hans, although their actual fertility rate was also low. The Koreans' higher educational level and participation in professional and technical occupations may have influenced choosing a small family.

The successes of one-child policy should not be underestimated. It slowed down the population growth from 11.6% in 1979 to 5.9% in 2005 in PRC and reduced the population by an estimated 250–300 million. The total fertility rate fell from 2.8 in 1979 to 1.8 in 2001, well below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman (Festini and de Martino 2004). In the national level, the one-birth rate rose from 20.7% in 1970

to 72.4% in 2003 (White 2006, p. 74). Over 95% of preschool children in urban areas, such as Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai, were only children (Rosenberg and Jing 1996). These reductions in fertility have eased some of the pressures on communities, the state, and the environment in a country that still carries one-fifth of the world's population.

Meanwhile, the large population base and annual net increase remained a tremendous pressure upon China's economic development, resources, and environment. The 2000 census reported a total population of 1.267 billion, and the number climbed to 1.285 billion in 2002 (NBSC 2006). As Peng Peiyun, Minister of the State Family Planning, stated, "China must adopt the strategy of sustainable development, promote further its family planning program and provide quality reproductive health service to the eligible couples" (Peng 1997, p. 926). To emphasize the long-term stability of this policy, China published in its first *Population and Family Planning Law* in 2002, setting birth control as "fundamental State policy" and providing national standards and regulations for its operations (The Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress 2001). The new law formally bans the attachment of subsistence income, use of physical force, or confiscation property in pursuit of population goals. Instead, it replaces the earlier fines for out-of-plan births with a "social compensation fee," ranging widely from 10% of annual income in some poor rural areas to three to seven times income in other largely urban areas (UNFPA 2003).

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### **The Social Consequences of One-Child Policy**

Several unintended consequences of the one-child policy have had an impact on the social and economic situation in China and in the family processes and dynamics. Among the immediate consequences of the policy are the unbalanced sex ratios and urban-rural ratios of newborns, the changing of family and kinship structure, and the speeding up of population aging. There are also

significant impacts on the format and stability of marriages, the norms of family and intergenerational relationships, and the socialization of the only child.

### **The Unbalanced Sex Ratios and Urban-Rural Ratio**

The main international criticism about one-child policy is its consequence of promoting discrimination against female newborns, who may be aborted, abandoned, or unregistered and who are most likely in disadvantaged status of health care and education. Over the 20 years' implementation of the one-child policy, the sex ratio of newborn boys to girls had risen from 108.5 in 1985 to 119 in 2005 (BBC 2006). Sex ratios, higher than 125, were found in 99 cities (BBC 2006). A recent national representative survey suggests the ratio reached 123 in the period of 1996–2001 (Ding and Hesketh 2006). The male bias was stronger for second- and third- or higher-order births with 121 and 127 in 1990 and an increase to 152 and 160 by 2000 (China Population Research Center 2002).

Three factors including sex-selected abortion, female infanticide and abandonment, and unreported female birth were responsible for China's unbalanced sex ratios (White 2006). The easy access in China in the 1980s to the ultrasound technology for fetal sex identification made it easier to guarantee the birth of a son. Many children with disabilities were diagnosed through ultrasound exams and modern techniques (Shao and Herbig 1994) and eventually aborted. Over 16,000 abandoned children were brought to civil affair departments in Hunan province between 1986 and 1990 (Johnson 1996). While figures on abandonment are lacking at the national level, some estimates suggest perhaps 4.5% of babies, mostly female, are abandoned (Siu 1998). In 2000, Hudson and den Boer reported that there is estimated to be 40.6 million missing women in China. About 1/3 of the sex bias may be due to underreporting of female newborns (Cai and Lavey 2003). Those unreported girls are usually disadvantaged in access to public education and



social welfare; however, informal adoption may shelter many of them.

Since the one-child policy was implemented with different standards for urban and rural residents, the fertility rates of rural residents were higher than that of urban residents. In the 1990s, rural women's fertility rates were around 1.6–2.0, while the rates for urban women were 1.1–1.2 and resulted in zero or negative growth population in some well-developed metropolitan areas, such as Shanghai (Retherford et al. 2004). Because there are great urban–rural differences in economic development levels, unbalanced fertility rates will disadvantage poor rural families and affect the whole society.

## The Changes on Family and Kinship Structure

Two areas of family and kinship structure have changed: the emergence of the nuclear family in a looser kinship network and the consideration of adoption as both internationally and domestically feasible.

### Nuclear and Extended Family

The real and historic situations in the PRC were always different from images held by outsiders. Large extended families have never been the major family pattern in China, although the patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal, and familistic values of Confucian ideals were for centuries characteristic of Chinese life and values (Deutsch 2006). Stem families were still common in the 1980s but were influenced by limited housing options (Pimental and Liu 2004). In 1982, nuclear family (66.4%) and extended family (with three generations) (24.3%) were the major forms of urban families in the PRC (Liu 1987). Twelve years later in Beijing, the proportion of nuclear families was roughly the same (65.4%), compared to that of 1982. The percentage of extended families declined from 24.3% in 1982 to 18.0% in 1994, and a family form called “other families,” which includes such families as single parent families, divorced families, cohabitating families, increased from 4.56% in 1982 to 14.5%

in 1994 (Ma et al. 1994). The emergence of this group of families may represent a signal of increasing diversity of the PRC's family structure.

### Adoption

The one-child policy included discouraging adoption by regulations on whom and in what circumstances one may adopt. The 1992 law required persons adopting to have no children, be able to support the child, and be at least 35 years old. In 1999 the age was dropped to 30. Regulations were eased on children who were orphaned by death, who were in the care of social service agencies, or who had special needs. Officially registered adoptions increased from 2,900 in 1992 to 55,000 in 2001. Many more informal adoptions occur in rural areas and now they are more common everywhere. While adoption is not so frequent in China as in the developed world, it is less stigmatized than previously.

The pressure from outside agencies and governments to allow international adoption of Chinese children in institutional care has been intense. China has been the number one source of foreign-born children adopted by Americans averaging 3,500 children a year with mostly girls and some handicapped boys predominately from southeast PRC being adopted (Tessler et al. 1999). The State Department granted 6,493 visas to Chinese orphans in 2006 (Belluck and Yardley 2006). The total number of international adoptions is small, but it is highly symbolic for both PRC and the United States. While American media feature stories of horrific conditions in overcrowded Chinese orphanages, Chinese scholars and bureaucrats worry about how well the adopted children are treated in the USA (Tessler et al. 1999, pp. 139–144). Americans have found that the relative efficiency of Chinese adoption allows new options for Americans frustrated in the adoption process in the USA (Bouman 2000).

Within China there are regional traditions and adoption norms. Zhang (2001) reports on one north China village where families adopted girls to achieve family goals of help and care in the present

and future. Some sham adoptions were used to hide girls against family planning enforcement. Many couples with children adopt and are increasingly willing to adopt girls (Zhang 2006). The lowering of the parents' age requirement and the inclusion of children who were abandoned to be eligible for adoption in 1998 may have promoted formal adoption. Families often prefer to have both a boy and a girl in rural settings and use adoption to meet this goal. In this qualitative study, of the 282 adoptions of girls, only 12% would have preferred a boy. Adoption practices in local communities are fairly secret as couples are unwilling to be seen as infertile or unable to produce a son. Some families adopt when a child is abandoned on their front step, but kin and intermediaries are most frequent sources. Usually kin do not exchange money, but gifts or celebrations may be costly. "Rural families make decisions following their own perceived interests rather than State directives. Moreover, people do not respond to policies on paper, but to how the policies are implemented in practice" (Zhang 2006, p. 333). The outcomes of in-country adoptions are beginning to be studied in China and in an analysis of nutritional status and physical well-being, adopted children were found to have similar outcomes to biological children (Liu et al. 2004). Girls appear to be as well treated as boys. However, fewer were in school and had immunizations perhaps because of formal regulations. Adoption is one of the potential structures for more flexible population programs and for protection of girls and handicapped children against the harsh reactions of couples and families to the one-child policy.

### The Acceleration of Population Aging

Population aging has been a global phenomenon in modern societies as the result of improvement in nutrition, health and medication, and the extension of life expectancy. The increased aging of China's population is a product of the implementation of one-child policy. Before the policy Chinese population was mostly youthful with those 65 years old or older being 4.4% in 1953 and 3.6% in 1964 (NBSC 2003, p. 99). The proportion of population aged 0–14 dropped from 40.7% in 1964 to 19.5%

in 2005. Accordingly, the proportion of 65 years old or older increased from 4.9% in 1982 to 9.1% in 2005 (NBSC 2006). It took France 40 years, Sweden 42 years, and Great Britain 61 years to complete this process (Tian et al. 1991), while China has only spent about two and a half decades for the transition. The proportion of elderly is expected to grow to 13.2% and to 22.7% by 2025 and 2050, respectively (United Nations 2001).

The rapid population aging process has profound effects on Chinese society. China's old people's dependency ratio has increased from 6.4% in 1964 to 12.7% in 2005 (NBSC 2006). Many families are structured as 4–2–1 since the first generation of only children has reached their age of marriage. Therefore, a young married couple has to take care of four parents without help from siblings. If the one-child policy persists, the care burden of second generation of only-child couples would be doubled or even tripled and the pool of family support of aged parents would shrink. Only 17% of Chinese elders currently have some form of pension and more than 70% rely only on the support of their children (Festini and de Martino 2004). Parents of only children have earlier empty-nest periods of about 5–10 years, and longer lives, requiring policies and programs for adulthood development and education (Zhao 2006). The long-term consequences of population aging and smaller families (which do not have the lateral kin or siblings of former years) are to increase the burden and responsibility of caregiving on the single adult child and his or her spouse. Later, when the adult child has health or aging problems of his or her own, services and support from the larger society will be required. The closeness that a young woman has with their own parents and grandparents, due to their sponsorship of her in education and achievement, will be a challenge to the traditional expectations of her role with her in-laws.

### The Formation and Dissolution of Marriages

Strengthened by Confucianism ideology and administrative measures, the Chinese institution of marriage has had a stable structure, evidenced

by very low divorce rates. Before 1979 China divorce rates were below 5 divorces per 100 marriages. Since 1980s, China's divorce rates have increased from 5% in 1979 to 15.3% in 2001 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China 2002). The one-child policy has had some influence on divorce rates in combination with other social changes (Sheng 2005). Having only one child released young couples from additional child-bearing and child-rearing burdens and allowed them to devote more time and energy pursuing their careers and avocations. Consequently, the bonds of marriage are loosening. When there is a conflict of interests between wives and husbands, divorce is more likely to become the solution. In the current prosperous economic situation, couples may feel free to go their own ways because they can support themselves.

Studies about their marriages and divorces have just begun to emerge. The trend toward increased marriage instability seems more important among the first generation of only-children families. In a recent survey on marriages of first generation, only-children couples who are only children (in contrast to not only-child couples) are more likely to be open-minded to premarriage and/or out-of-wedlock sexual behaviors (72% vs. 62%), more likely to rely on their parents for wedding expenses (18% vs. 10%) and childcare (45.7% vs. 28.1%), and more likely to co-reside with their parents after marriage (50.5% vs. 42.5%) (Dajiyuan 2004). Co-residency with parents can help the younger generation but may cause many conflicts. A recent study of 162 married couples aged under 30 years old revealed that about 87% of only children felt pressured to find a spouse to satisfy their parents, 58% acknowledged their parents were a factor in the breakup, and 55% said that their parents interfered with their marriages (Xinhua 2006). Divorce rates vary by the adult child's status with rates of 24.5% when both were only children, 8.4% when one was an only child, and 11.7% for those from families with more than one child (Xinhua 2006).

There are potential marriage barriers for men due to this imbalanced sex ratio. Estimates, based upon the 2000 census data, suggest that by 2020,

there will be 112.8 million men aged 25–35 years old. In contrast, the number of their best matching cohort of women aged 20–30 years old will be 72.1 million, creating a ratio of three men to every two eligible women (Boxun 2005). The shortage of brides may not just impact individuals and families (Tuljapurkar et al. 1995) but also may threaten China's stability in the future (Hudson and den Boer 2002).

Second marriages may be more prevalent in future. Second marriages challenge the one-child policy when one partner has already been a parent and the other has not. With the unbalanced sex ratio, women may have opportunities for remarriage that were not possible in either the traditional or revolutionary Chinese culture.

### **Changing Norms of Family and Intergenerational Relationships**

Family norms such as fertility and child preferences, living arrangements, and care of the aged are changing markedly. These trends suggest some insights about Chinese families and intergenerational relationships in future.

#### **Fertility and Child Preferences**

Traditionally, an ideal Chinese family consisted of as many generations of the male line and as many male siblings as possible (Chi 1989). According to Confucianism, the worst among three grave failures in filial responsibility is to fail to have a son (Hillier 1988). In contrast, by 1982, when the strict policy was in place, a family survey in Beijing reported that among 773 married women, 55% of them preferred to have one child, while 37% of them preferred to have two (Zheng and Me 1987). Twenty years later, Li (2003) in Beijing reported an increase on zero or one child. The majority of the samples had no particular gender preference on children (63.1%). Feng (2004) reported similar data. A survey of only children aged 20–30 years old in Shanghai revealed about half of the respondents wished to have two children, and mean desirable number of children was 1.46 (Gong 2006). More than 3/4 of the respondents said that it does not matter

about having a son or a daughter. With equal education and more open employment opportunities, the traditional reasons for male preference are no longer as applicable in big cities like Shanghai where in 2000 there was a normal sex ratio of 106 boys to 100 girls (Nie and Wyler 2005). This shift towards accepting a norm of one or two children and having less of a gender preference is a major difference from Confucian ideology.

New ideas about the purposes of child rearing are associated with this change. Rearing children for aged security and for succession of a patriarchal line was another important traditional belief of Chinese people (Ning et al. 1995). The one-child policy has created a new reality with a couple having only one child for later life support and care and questioning the traditional norms of child rearing. In Beijing only 11.8% and 5.6% of the respondents reported that their “purpose of having children” was for aged support or for succession of patriarchal line, respectively (Ma et al. 1994). Instead, 27% of the respondents agreed that the purpose of having children was for affective satisfaction, 23.4% for realization of unfulfilled ideals, and 20.8% simply said that it is natural to have a child.

### Living Arrangements

Chinese cultural norms favored large, multigenerational families where elders are supported and youngsters are cared for under the same roof. According to 2000 census data, about 3/4 of elders lived with their children (NBSC 2001). In 1988, a national survey of people over 60 years old reported that 44.8% of the respondents supported the idea of “living together with at least one married child,” 35.1% of them preferred to “live close but not necessarily together,” and only 4.8% of them would like to “live separately with children,” although 41% of them were actually living with their adult children when the survey was conducted (Hu and Ye 1991; Sheng 1992). Six years later, Ma et al. (1994) found in Beijing that the proportion of favoring to live together with adult children fell to 24.5%, and those preferred to live separately increased from 4.8% in 1988 to 14.5%, while the percentage of

people preferred to “live close but not necessarily together” remained to be roughly the same as that of the 1988 survey (32.3%). A sample of 1,786 young workers in 12 Chinese cities reported that about 2/3 of only-child couples were living separately from their parents, and those living with husbands’ and wives’ parents were evenly divided (Feng 2006). Living separately is expected to increase as the first generation of only children gets married. One-fifth of couples in an urban study by Pimental and Liu (2004) experienced co-residence for significant time with the wife’s parent(s), suggesting that residence patterns now include the wife’s family ties as well. Increasing independence and increased availability of housing has also been a force in changed separate living arrangements (Deutsch 2006). Young people often do not want to co-reside with their parents even when they live in the same city. In some areas in rural China, the practice of uxorilocal marriage in which the daughter remains in her own family and the man is brought into that family had been viewed as an inferior marriage form but may be less so in terms of the one-child family (Han 2003). Even in rural areas most parents are seeing independent residence as more popular and appropriate (Han 2003). The demand for alternative living arrangements for elder generations and more institutional care is likely to increase especially as both mobility and opportunity are more available.

### Elder Care

Filial support to parents is not only one of China’s traditional merits but also the indispensable part of intergenerational exchanges which happen over the family developmental cycle (Ning et al. 1995). Parental support has been more than a moral obligation; it was an economic obligation that balanced the older generations for investments and transfers of resources to children. While the norm of filial piety is still very strong, people may be forced to reconsider its practicality and feasibility. The family consciousness survey revealed that the younger generation (20–40 years old) tend to have higher expectations for institutional care (23.6%) than the elder generations

over 60 years old (11.3%). Similarly, the expectations for being cared by children were in the opposite direction for the younger generations (10%) and for the elder generations (37%) (Ma et al. 1994).

The family remains the main support of its older members, particularly in rural areas. The lack of comprehensive pensions, except for government and large companies, means that nearly 70% of elderly people depend on their children's financial help (Hesketh et al. 2005). Since many rural Chinese do not have any pension and follow the practice of village exogamy, the birth of sons remains an important feature of security (Ikels 1990). In the rural areas, reform has caused a surplus of workers, as farming has become more efficient and migration to urban areas has followed, leaving many elderly alone (Goldstein et al. 1997).

Although elder care has been viewed as the responsibility of the son, the actual care was mostly given by the daughter-in-law. When the only child is a girl, her parents have no one else to care for them and are in no hurry to sever their ties with her. The lack of formal services for the elderly and the increasing length of life will cause stress for the single adult child who is no longer young and may be responsible for a large group of frail elderly (Ikels 1990). Oeppen and Vaupel (2002) emphasize that the steady expansion of life expectancy worldwide has not reached a ceiling and that both the old and the old-old sectors of the demographic profile will have much greater demands for pension, health care, and social needs than planners are expecting. Smaller families with many elders will be challenged to make up the shortfall. Daughters now support their older parents' care, too. In the cities, more and more young couples live with, or at least close to, the wives' parents (Pimental and Liu 2004). In rural areas, many daughters also take the responsibility of supporting the family. Girls may leave their hometown to go to cities, searching for a job, or entering university. Although they may not get a high salary, they still keep a link between them and their parents. Some choose to bring their older parents to the cities and others send money home.

## Socialization of the Only Child

The socialization of the only child in China is nested in the nuclear and extended family but has many inputs from the schools and communities. Both concerns and high expectations for the children have shaped research questions and data analysis of the period.

## Parenting and Grandparenting

According to a recent estimate, by 1999, China had had a total of 86–92 million of only children (Yang and Guo 2004). Calculations based on this data predict that the total number of China's only children exceeded 100 million in 2007. As the majority of children today have grown up in one-child families, and have experienced more gender equality and prosperity, concerns about parenting and grandparenting have been raised (Deutsch 2006). The belief that an only child belongs to both sets of grandparents has become more common.

Anticipating this transition during the 1980s, speculations were that the only-child cohort would become a spoiled generation characterized as effeminate, sluggish, willful, and selfish "*Little Emperor*" (Han 1986) because their parents were giving superior human and material resources to them. In 1986, the *Guang Ming Daily*, one of the largest newspapers in China, launched a nationwide discussion on these issues and concluded that the only children would have superior nutrition and health care, overdeveloped intelligence, but be imbalanced on psychological development, and have less attention to moral qualities (Feng 2002).

Parents of only children usually have great expectations and encourage their children to study for academic achievement because they believe that it is critical for their children's success in an increasingly competitive world (Man 1993). According to a Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences survey (Zhu 1992), 55% of the parents considered the good school achievement of their only children as the happiest moment of their families, and more than half of the parents say they would punish if the child failed an exam. Parents of only children devoted more time than



parents of children with siblings to work with their children on their studies. In Beijing, Chen (1986) found that 76% of the mothers and 51% of the fathers, of only children, spent more than half of their leisure time with their children, while only 60% of mothers and 45% of fathers of children with sibling(s) did so. About 20% of mothers and 10% of fathers of only children reported that they spent almost all of their leisure time with their children, while only 7.2% of the mothers and 4.8% of the fathers of children with sibling(s) did so. Feng (1993) interviewed 1,293 pupils in Hubei province and found that 74% of the fathers and 83.4% of the mothers of only children often played with their children, while 55.9% of fathers and 61.3% of mothers of children with siblings did so. In addition to regular school curriculum, about 80% of pupils take extra training classes during weekends including math, writing, computer, music, English, dancing, and arts. In a study of schoolchildren in the Changchun metropolitan area, they found only children performing better in mathematics and language tests, especially in the urban areas, and they were rated higher by their teachers in positive personality variables (Poston and Falbo 1990a). The competition to get into “key point” schools requires an early focus on achievement, and often, families are spending 15% of income on educational expenses and many are willing to borrow for college education which is no longer entirely free (Fong 2002). Girls are often enrolled in music as well as other tutorials, while “...urban singleton daughters enjoy unprecedented support for their effort to challenge norms that work against them while utilizing those that work in their favor” (Fong 2002, p. 1105). Of course, not everyone will be able to use education as a way forward, and some disappointment and frustration are likely to result from the high level of effort to get into college and limits on job and mobility outcomes. “Children bear the burden of these expectations and the possibility of a leisurely childhood is largely sacrificed to studying” (Nie and Wyler 2005, p. 330).

Some of the parenting difficulties reported in the child-rearing literature may stem from parents’ desires to instill values which may be

inconsistent or difficult to apply to everyday experiences. Fong (2007) reported on her extensive studies of parenting in Dalian, China, and provided some in-depth case studies to illustrate how challenging it is for parents to teach even such well-agreed-upon values as obedience, caring/sociableness, independence, and excellence with ordinary children and youth. The gap between the complexity of the social value and the application was not bridged easily. Parents were often disappointed when young people’s behavioral choices seemed to lack one or another value while meeting another precept too literally. Some of these conflicts stem from other social and economic changes that have accompanied the demographic change and not just the situation of the singleton child.

Most preschool children in the PRC are in daycare facilities for most of the day where they play with peers and are socialized to share and begin to learn cultural values. Using a combination of data from the China Health and Nutrition Survey and a small in-depth qualitative interview study, Short et al. (2001) examined young children’s care in the family including grandmothers, fathers, and mothers. Joint participation of father and mother in childcare was greater when the child had some preschool care in an educational setting. A little over one-fifth of the children received care from grandmothers (Wang 2007). Grandmothers while very involved in care tended to see their role as less critical than the parents and therefore less responsible overall. Grandparents are an important source of caregiving in China, especially when their grandchildren are young and/or the parents are not available due to employment or migration. Co-residence and nearby residence may provide access for children’s care, especially of the child under three. While mothers are relieved of some of the childcare role and see grandparents as more dependable than domestic helpers and children often gain in social skills, there are conflicts between the generations in caregiving approaches with grandparents having different preferences and sending double messages to children and grandparents being exhausted by the young child’s needs (Goh 2006). According to recent surveys,

about 76.5% of Shanghai children aged 0–3 were residing with and 88.9% of them were directly cared for by their grandparents (Honggen 2007), and the rate of grandparent caregiving for Tian Jin was 85.6% (Liu 2007). The rates of grandparent involvement fall as the children go to pre-schools. In a nationwide survey, about 70% of children aged 0–6 were cared for and educated by their grandparents in Beijing, in Shanghai 60%, and in Guangzhou 50% (Wenhui Daily 2005). Grandparents' proximity to provide childcare reduced childcare load for young couples, especially the mothers (Chen et al. 2000). Grandparent care raised concerns about the quality of early socialization of children because children with grandparents may be more likely to be spoiled and indulged (Guan 2000).

Parents did not report differences that characterized singles differently from those with siblings in personality and virtues. Girls and children whose parents were educated and had high expectations did better scholastically. Davin (1989) suggested that the increased attention and resources devoted to childbearing may ultimately have quite beneficial effects on only-children's development.

## Child Development

Research in child development has been intensive and has become more refined as children could be followed from infancy to young adulthood. While the child development literature usually handles family as a background variable, in this chapter, we connect the studies directly to the issues of the one-child family as this is the major concern in these studies: whether children are being socialized appropriately at home and in school. Early studies collecting data from kindergarten and elementary school children reported that only children displayed several undesirable personality traits. They were more egocentric and weaker in persistence at a task, behavioral control, and tension-binding qualities or inhibition (Jiao et al. 1986). Later some studies showed marked food preferences, short attention span, obstinacy, and demand for immediate gratification

(Wan et al. 1994b) and were weaker on some traits of individual initiative (Huang 1992) and the abilities of self-care (Yang et al. 2003). Li and Liu (1989) found that only-children's personality difficulties are more serious than non-only children, although their intellectual achievement is higher than children with siblings. Chen (1986) found lower affiliation in suburban boys who were only children but not for girls. Other researchers found either no significant differences between only children and non-only children on their personality development or only children were better on certain personality traits (Poston and Falbo 1990b; Gao 1992; Wan et al. 1994a; Liu 1988; Tao et al. 1996, 1999; Yang et al. 1995).

During the period of middle and high school, any personality differences between only children and children with siblings seemed smaller, and in some aspects, only children even did better than did children with siblings. Using standard Y-G personality scale, He (1997) reported no significant differences on most personal trait items for high school students. Collecting data from middle schools in Chinese cities in 1996 and 1998, in contrast to the "Little Emperor's" hypothesis, Feng (2000) found that only children were more advanced in their social abilities than children with siblings. They were more likely to have new friends, more easygoing, and less likely to be alone.

New studies on college students who are only children revealed that they were more advanced than children with siblings in major personality traits (Feng 2002). In four universities in Guangzhou, Jing (1997) found that only children were more advanced than non-only children in sociability, competition, and cognitive self-estimation but weaker than non-only children in taking care of themselves. Duan (1997) concluded that the psychological characteristics and health of only children were significantly better than that of non-only children in their study. Applying SCL-90 (sleep disorder and sleep evaluation) to university freshmen, Dai et al. (2000) found the level of psychological well-being of only children was significantly higher than that of non-only children. Using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire,

Chen, Wang, and Miao (2000) revealed no significant differences between only children and non-only children. In general, female only children appeared more naive and infantile. In contrast, Lu (2002) showed that the psychological well-being of only-girl undergraduate students, measured by the University Personality Inventory (UPE), was significantly advanced than that of students with siblings.

Over the past 25 years, more than 200 research studies have been done on only-children's academic and personality development in school (Falbo et al. 1996). The specific findings of these researches vary widely and are often contradictory with each other in terms of the measures applied, period of schooling, and regions of residence (Feng 2002). It is now commonly agreed that, compared to children with siblings, only children tended to be more advanced in the development of certain cognitive, emotional, and physical domains. However, arguments focused on the personality development of only children during the period of early childhood still remain to be settled. Long-term personality outcomes appear favorable to the only child. Parents and grandparents are highly involved in the rearing of the only child. Overall, the early expectation of achievement or personality difficulties for only children and young adults has not been fulfilled. Only children in China have many of the same advantages in development found in the research on only and first children worldwide. The child development research can be seen as a strong source of positive evaluation of the outcomes of the one-child programs and policies and of how families have responded to the new situation.

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## **Conclusion: Challenges Confronting Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century**

### **Current Situation**

Retherford et al. (2005) note that some care must be taken in estimating the actual decrease in fertility but suggest it was close to 1.0 among urban women and those with high school or college

education and in 2000 being closer to 1.5 or 1.6 for all of China. Some signals suggest that China is attempting to soften its one-child policy. Among the potential trends are changing policies about IUDs or sterilization, second pregnancies, and fines as an option or if the first child was a girl perhaps eliminating the fine (Bernman 1999). Hesketh and Xing (2000) note a UN-sponsored project to abolish population goals and targets in 32 counties in 16 regions in China coupled with enhanced contraceptive choices, which, if effective, may suggest a new "small family culture" is evolving. In some large cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, which have already reached or are approaching zero growth of population, more relaxed regulations for implementing the policy have been proposed in recent years, including letting couples who are both only children have two children. According to UN projections, China's population will actually start to decline in 2042 (China's Lifestyle Choice 2001). Hesketh and Xing (2000) notes that 800 of 3,000 counties are now using a more client-centered family planning service approach and that couples no longer need to obtain permission to have a first child or time the pregnancy to meet local quotas.

Some of the implications of the one-child policy are already being felt. The focus of more adults in child-rearing of fewer children has provided better opportunities and resources for these children. While questions about oversolicitous adults either pressuring the child to perform or encouraging self-centered behavior are still concerns, it is clear that the one child has some of the special advantages of oldest and only children that have been documented in other societies. Rosenberg and Jing (1996) suggest that a new interactive or reciprocating relationship may be the outcome for both family and society. Higher achievement, aspirations for education, greater leadership with peers, and identification with parents' values characterize the PRC's one-child families. Children are receiving more individual attention from both their families and society. The competition among grandparents for nurturing of their grandchildren may actually intensify over what has already been reported. Certainly the woman's parents in a one-child family have a

major lifetime interest in her and her child which is both new and normatively unstructured.

Several new issues are beginning to surface, which will have larger social and economic ramifications. Competition for educational and career opportunities is likely to be accentuated, not decreased as the Chinese families are much smaller. Changing gender roles will be played out in regard to both what obligations to the elderly are seen as currently relevant and who will be involved in caring for the much larger population sector of the elderly and frail elderly. Changing expectations and perceptions of marriage and parenting are already being seen and are likely to be more dramatic in future. Not only do the demographic trends but also the economic and social opportunity and structural changes provide a changing set of options at the familial level. In addition to exploring these three sets of new trends, we will conclude with some speculations based on research in terms of the possible changing policies on population.

### **Competition for Educational and Career Opportunities**

Economic conditions in China today are vastly better than those of early post-revolutionary China, especially on the east coast and some large cities in the middle or in western China. The effect of these developments has been to convince couples of the desirability of small families. As more resources become available to consumers, parents have more chances to provide such resources to children. The ratio of grandparents to grandchildren has been favorable for good childcare, and in addition, there are relatively good childcare and school institutions in urban areas. The demographic transition has permeated the school system. The only-child sector has already climbed above 50 million in the early 1990s, accounting for one-fourth of Chinese population aged from 0 to 9, according to the 1990 Census data (China Population Statistics Yearbook 1995). By 1995, almost all (95%) of preschool children, more than 90% of kindergarteners, and the majority (60%) of university

freshmen in urban PRC were from only-child families (China Statistical Yearbook 1997). This massive shift has been accompanied by an increased interest and support for academic and career success for each child and even greater competition for places in the elite and advanced educational institutions. Pressure for high-quality schooling will likely be intense. While in the short run many lower division schools have rented out space to small businesses to support education as the numbers of school children fell due to the population policy, it is possible that adults, in addition, will want to see smaller classes and more creative curricular offerings. Both the older generations and their one-child cohorts will desire more educational and vocational training options as longer lifetimes require more frequent job shifts and retraining. Not only will there be pressure on the universities for a greater proportion of students to be admitted, but other post secondary educational institutions to be developed. A smaller overall student body suggests more rather than less higher education.

The challenge to develop responsive options is quite massive in a large nation in which much infrastructure has been centralized. There have been major changes in the infrastructure for education. Higher education has expanded by more than doubling the number of institutions from 598 in 1978 to 1792 in 2005 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2006). Whole new universities have been founded and built from the ground up, often each serving 50,000 or more students. At the same time preschool, primary, and secondary schools (with the exception of vocational schools which have doubled in number) have decreased in number as the population distribution has changed. Even with the large numbers of Chinese students studying abroad (over 300,000 in the past 20 years) and the greatly increased master's and doctoral postgraduate level programs in China, there may be a shortfall of professors to develop these new educational institutions (Department of Planning Ministry PRC 2003).

There is already more movement within China's regions of young people looking for opportunity and the need for capital both for economic development and human capital

development may polarize public opinion on what is fair access. Online and distance education opportunities may put brand name options within the reach of more families. Internet classes had 891,046 new students' enrollment in 2005 with 2,652,679 total enrollments (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2006). A wide variety of subject areas are available and growth in this sector is quite likely. Vocational education and technical training is also growing rapidly with a much broader range of providers than the main educational institutions. Counties, townships, villages and collectives, and even some private providers are involved providing practical and adult education.

Studies about only-children's career development have begun to emerge because the first generation of only children is just about to begin their careers. Based on the survey, results showing only children had more intention to change jobs but were less likely to make actual job turnover in comparison to non-only children. Su (1998) concluded that career adaptability of only children was lower than that of non-only children. However, Feng and Wang (2003) argued that, rather than showing lower job adaptability, this finding may actually be evidence of higher level job adaptability of only children. Based on a survey of 638 urban youth workers in Hubei province, Feng and Wang (2003) found no significant difference between only children and non-only children in their occupational adaptability, and only children were doing as well as non-only children in their jobs, suggesting that the effect of being only or non-only children on career development was minor. With a rapidly expanding economy and changing career trajectories, more attention is given to actively teaching young people about vocational and professional careers and options. Whether one can move in and out of socioeconomic processes may be questionable. The Chinese rural economy had major shifts during the period of institutionalization of the one-child family with the distribution of land and responsibility from the People's Communes and the beginning of other local industries and businesses with some entrepreneurship (Walder 2002). An increasing role for

wage labor in rural household income is being seen. The understanding of the very real differences in urban career paths in China during both historically and in the recent changes had emphasized the role of party over educational credentials, especially in administrative positions (Walder et al. 2000).

## Competition for Care and Support

Because the transition to smaller families has been more comprehensive in urban than rural areas, some of the cohort changes will necessarily be more intense in urban situations. Lack of appropriate infrastructure for the institutional care of the aged, coupled with the lack of tradition for daughters' caring for their own parents, may put many elderly at risk to limited support and care by their families and the society. Pensions are helpful in supporting aging but are likely to be insufficient for long-term care of frail elderly persons. The number of the extremely elderly Chinese is already growing rapidly (Yi and Vaupel 2003). Whether or not an institutional response would make sense in the PRC, depending only on families with only children and a grandchild for care, would seem uncertain. The co-location of families that has been somewhat taken for granted in the PRC may be less likely as children receive more specialized training and have opportunities for mobility including international travel and education. "To meet the double demand of work and parental care in the future, more service options are needed to release this tension between work and care ..." (Zhan 2004, p. 122). Zhan also suggests that compensation may be necessary for either family caregivers or other service personal. Joseph and Phillips (1999) suggest that there is a wide range of capability in rural communities to provide support to the elderly and that some communities will do much better than others at providing support of all kinds. Elder care at a distance, which has been so demanding in the United States, may become more common in China. Just as Thanksgiving is a pilgrimage home for families scattered in America, the Chinese New Year points up the



amount of migration and return to home that family members try to do. Transportation is strained and stories of family trials in getting together already are part of the culture.

### **Changing Expectations and Perceptions of Marriage and Parenting**

Families' preferences for a male child may create problems of marriage in this younger generation. First, young women who are well educated and economically well off may be a bit more selective in their choice of marital partner or may not find early marriage or any marriage at all attractive. Their families may also want some assurances that they will not be left out of the caregiving and consideration of their daughters in a marriage. While, no doubt, there will be many less well off women who are seeking marriage, especially in the countryside, young urban men and their families may not find these opportunities suitable. Some changes in norms and customs of marriage may be developed as the realities of sex ratios and probabilities are addressed. Negotiation among families may become more important around marital decisions. At the same time the tight marriage market may allow women more opportunity for love matches and personal choice. More lifelong single males will be searching for social support and care. Certainly the indulgence and close relationships that characterize child-rearing in China today may change the basis on which expectations for care and attention to an older society may be generated. If love and affection are the basis for ties to one's parents and grandparents, care may flow without reference to duty. The reach of social insurance and pensions beyond the urban scene may be necessary to bring a similar shift to rural areas.

Domestic labor division and everyday life are also likely to be subject to revised expectations and outcomes. When women have more employment and options to choose to marry or not, the basis of the patriarchy and even the informal political climate are threatened. Even if there were no marked changes in the spousal allocations of domestic responsibility, smaller families

dramatically shorten the period of time when childcare and associated housework are the central themes of family life, and with greatly lengthened life expectancies, women will have many more options and opportunities to negotiate or renegotiate gender roles and household tasks. Household tasks allocation has been used as a measure of equity in spousal relations in many studies, but it is not necessarily the key concept in every society, especially if paid help or outside services are available. One pioneering study by Chow and Chen (1994) which compared one child and multiple child families did not find big differences in the pattern of sharing of household work and mothers spent significantly more time in childcare, but not much difference was found in the two types of households. Short et al. (2001) notes that there are differences in what childcare tasks fathers did as compared to mothers and grandmothers. Fong (2002) suggests that young women expect that the division of labor will be more egalitarian in their marriages than those of their parents. Improvements in housing and household equipment are both a possible support for egalitarian division of labor and also an invitation to more labor. It is not clear how important the impact of the one-child family will be on more egalitarian gender roles within the family but certainly the trend seems to be in that direction.

### **Changing Policy on Population**

A final word about whether relaxation of the mandates from the government and in the implementation of family size policy would radically shift trends would suggest that demographic changes are likely to be sustained in general. While one cannot be sure what would have happened under different policy conditions in China, across the globe women who have education, access to contraception and abortion and their own earned income are limiting their families to replacement or below replacement levels. United Nations studies (2001) show the swift adoption of a major demographic transition in developing countries has outpaced predictions. Some of

China's neighbors who have the lowest birth rates had substantial declines in fertility in the past 25 years including Singapore (1.04), Japan (1.38), and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (0.91) (Hesketh et al. 2005, p. 1172). When an underdeveloped country, such as Bangladesh, can make the transition to replacement in a mere 20 years, it shows that our forecasts for the future are dependent on small differences in family decisions made over large sectors of the population (Belsie 2000). It seems likely that Chinese women may not be so different from other women in today's world. The policies and programs of the one-child program were never implemented in an "ideal" fashion. The evolution of the one-child policy, as reviewed here, previously suggests that there are both local/regional and global influences upon the selection, implementation, and support for the policies. Certain exceptions were and are made. Some rationales for exceptions are preferable to the general population and are likely to be continued. Some incentive/disincentive schemes were and are more persuasive to some groups than others. Increasing flexibility and positive rewards are likely changes. Moving away from specific local goals and negative sanctions seems feasible. Opportunities for domestic adoption of children may also increase as policy is fine tuned. Men and women alike have seen opportunities open up for their smaller families and have lavished care on fewer children to a good effect. Current advantages to small families are even more built into other developing social and economic changes and are supportive in the future of small families. When the death toll in the earthquake left many families in the Sichun province childless, the government did relax the policy so they might have another child or legalize a child previously not recognized (Jacobs 2008). A year later many births occurred, but people are not necessarily content (Wong 2009). Some couples were infertile and there were many miscarriages reported. A well-loved child is not simply replaced. The complexity of the outcomes from the one-child policy in a many new situations suggests further modifications and flexibilities will be needed. Current economic conditions may also strain the system. The future

of China's families will need to include more formal supports for broad-based education, health, old age care, and continued emphasis on the opening of opportunities in rural as well as urban situations.

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# “The Youth Problem” Is Not a Youth Problem

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Chan Nin and Chan Kwok-bun

The youth do not usually constitute an academic topic for serious scholarly research in Hong Kong. The government, scholars, media, and social discourse typically view the youth as problematic; the youth are seen as a social problem, an illness awaiting therapy. With this mind-set, it is not surprising that research on the youth is often done by social workers, youth organizations and NGOs.

A review of past works on the Hong Kong youth points to several types of studies. The first type focuses on different kinds of “youth problems,” difficulties, or “problematic behaviors”: unemployment, discontinuation of schooling, lack of integration into society, and deviance including drug addiction, smoking, alcoholism, etc. (民主建港聯盟 2002; 突破機構 2003).

The second type is surveys. It can be divided into two kinds: one is regularly based whose objective is to collect general data on the attitudes of youth. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups has done this kind of surveys for several years. It has developed different survey series, e.g., Youth Poll Series, Youth Study Series, and Hong Kong Youth Trend Series. The other kind is reflection on “hot issues” at particular times, such as investigation into youth’s opinions on the Government Policy Address (張靜雲

1999), or their views about the Beijing Olympic Games (張靜雲 2001).

The third type consists of investigations done in order to learn about the youth’s values, for instance, how they see marriage and its future, their attitudes towards poverty and war, etc. (曾福怡 et al. 2003).

The fourth type is mainly about personal development and education, often closely related to the practice of psychology (黃成榮 2004).

Much research on the youth in Hong Kong, especially those done by NGOs, comprises reactions to “hot issues.” They offer quick responses to society and its latest condition. This kind of work is too passive and not forward-looking and development-oriented enough. Another weakness is that most of them merely focus on practical problems (typical in social work practice) and lack theoretical analysis. As a result, there does not exist a systematic body of deep knowledge about the Hong Kong youth.

Like in Chan’s Ch. 18 in this handbook, our own research and published works dealing with the youth have to do with our analyses of marriage and the family in Chinese societies (Chan and Wong 2005; Chan 2008a, b, 2010a, b, 2011; 陳國賁 2007) which focus their analytical gaze at the gender and generation politics at the heart of the family as a social institution. Such analyses are a sustained critique of structural functionalism, while finding affinity with feminism, Marxism and critical theory which have thrown up several insights. One insight revolves around

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the theme of differential distribution of power among family members because of one's gender and age, thus the generation and gender politics—and struggle. A particular member's share of power in the family has everything to do with the social structure's workings which are outside the family but penetrate it deeply. The ins are determined by the outs: parents have more power than their children, a husband has more power than his wife, and so on. Yet, Hong Kong is at the crossroads of "East" and "West," modernity and traditionality, which set the stage for social transformations within and outside the family, thus the territory's experimentation with a diversity of family forms and functions, resulting in dual-career families, low fertility rates, delay in marriage, increasing divorce rates, increased incidence of wife and child abuse, etc. The second insight has to do with changing conceptions and definitions of the family, one of which sees the family as a contested domain, a site for disputes, negotiations, and struggles. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the Hong Kong family is now in a state of turmoil, if not yet in a crisis; the aspirations are strong for equality between sexes and between generations, for democracy and democratization, and for individualism and autonomy whereby the individual should be treated as a person, not merely a wife, a baby, a child, a son, a daughter, all of which being signs of postmodernity though not without its strains and stresses, its instability and upheavals. In a profound way, these yearnings for equality and democracy in the family mirror those same yearnings outside it, in society. Understood in this way, a sociological analysis of the "youth problem" in Hong Kong society may need to start from within the family, from how the youth are first treated by the authority of the father, or we should say, the Father, which finds its reinforcement in the government and its apparatus, and the economy.

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### Statement of the Problem

What are the causes, processes, consequences, and implications of the "youth problem"? Before any endeavor to answer this question can

commence, is it not wise that we *demonstrate and verify the existence* of the youth in Hong Kong? The possible fact that we seem ready to give credence to such a proposition is itself cause for concern. It is perhaps through a rigorous inquiry into the problem's terms that we can arrive at its subtext. As Max Weber has shown us, the very designation/constitution of a problem, the forcible extraction of an ideal type from the social field, is impossible without a series of founding *exclusions*: why this object and not another? This supposition is twofold: that "the youth," despite the nominal differences that divide it from within, may constitute a *singular* mass and may experience itself as such. The assumption, then, is that there is some classificatory category that is "subjectivized" and internalized by its nominal instances, that is *lived* on a conscious level.

Certainly, such an assumption is solidified by the fact that many young activists are prepared to identify themselves as being *representative* of a determinate "generation." By instituting and mobilizing a boundary (post-1980s and beyond), this generation introduces a difference, a distinction that separates itself from those that precede, and follow from, it. Though it may strike some as cynicism, it would certainly be interesting to inquire whether the "Post-1980s" label is but a spectacle contrived for public consumption, a prefabricated product generated by the collusion between unwitting activists and the mass media. The symbiotic relationship between the two is certainly clear to see—not only has the media *framed* recent developments in a certain way (the Post-1980s Group being a living confirmation of popular clichés regarding an *apathetic youth*), in conspiring with the media and accepting its formulations, the Post-1980s Group has indeed begun to *conceive of itself* in those terms. This is the moment of *subjectivization* when an idea that is "in-itself" becomes "for-itself." What results is a sort of dialectical waltz between the newspapers and the exemplary "faces" of the "movement," who take it upon themselves to embody and incarnate the indignation of their peers. In short, a host of presumed latent desires are made manifest in the figure of Christina

Chan<sup>1</sup>; in her, the unspoken aspirations of an entire generation are given visible form. There can be no better demonstration of the dynamics of ideology that assume the form of a sociological discourse—Christina Chan is, as it were, the “ideal type” of the Post-1980s Generation, an emblematic image that brings to light that which has hitherto remained in the shadows, dormant, latent. If we are to understand anything of the *political* role of the media, it is crucial that we establish the function that Christina Chan serves in our social construction, the desires that crystallize around her image.

Here, the lesson of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, articulated with characteristic clarity in his *Dialogues* with Claire Parnet, could not be timelier: the grounds of dialogue are never neutral, they are always overdetermined by power relations. What this means is that the game of the media is rigged from the beginning, that the founding gesture of every conversation with the news is an interpellative one: from the outset, the Post-1980s Group has always already accepted the interlocutory position assigned to them, that of the Post-1980s “avant-garde.” This does not mean that media exposure is always futile, that visibility invariably amounts to surrender, but it does mean that vigilance and reflexivity are required if the group are to avoid the hazard of supplying the news with what it desires, overlooking the *regulative* function of media representation. Instead of feeding the discursive machine that maintains the consistency of “social reality,” the hegemonic glue that sutures heterogeneous events into a tentative totality, should we not strive to develop counter-discourses? The discursive struggle is the fight against hegemony—this ground cannot be ceded to the “experts” who purport to map its coordinates. Were the railway protests not a craving for a *future* that must be created, step-by-step, by sustained critical inquiry?

<sup>1</sup> Christina Chan is an activist based in Hong Kong whose good looks, revealing attire, libertarian politics and articulacy gained her a brief moment in fame in the city’s gossip press. The paparazzi’s fascination with her reached its height when she was featured on the cover of a local tabloid.

By localizing social unrest in a particular social strata, or category, the media effectively circumscribe and defuse it *in advance*, assigning a readable meaning, causality, and orientation to possibly a spontaneous irruption (the railway protests) that is probably incomprehensible. This is the trick of conservative sociology—in positing a combination of causes that converge in a social phenomenon, social science supplies a hypothesis that effectively eclipses the *singularity* of the phenomenon, inscribing it into the unilateral order of scientific causality. What this functionalist model is unable to think is the problem of tension that prevents the social body from achieving closing. The foreclosure of tension has ideological effects—it obviates the possibility of *contingency*, of a possibly purely accidental happening that signals the deadlocks and contradictions of the social. The functionalist model is overly reliant on an organicist vision of society, with its interlocking, coordinated parts and their regimented territories. The response of the establishment, the media, the social science “experts,” is thus predictable, directly coextensive with their operative logics: the youth are tired of being unheard, they must be recognized by the auspices of the establishment, integrated into its operations and proceedings. When their portion of the social share is enlarged, when the social mechanism is calibrated sufficiently to incorporate their demands, such a reconfiguration would return society to a state of former equilibrium—and harmony. The establishment, therefore, ignores a *political* question: what if dissent articulates a demand that is incommensurable with the functionalist rhetoric of recognition that questions the existing rubric of representation altogether?

It is the intent of this essay to probe the contours of the youth in Hong Kong society, a “generation” whose aspirations and discontents have been subject to a good deal of media (mis)representation in recent months. Hong Kong society has been told by the experts and the media alike that the railway protest is symptomatic of a “youth problem.” This is a perspective that is shared by those who are sympathetic toward the youth’s cause, as well as those who are opposed to it.

The ubiquity of Christina Chan in the local press, a visibility that has transformed her into a symbol of sorts, would have society believe that the “youth problem” is synonymous with boredom, apathy, indifference, and libertinism. Desires are explained away through classical sociological categories—the youth are afflicted with anomie and alienation. The “youth” are supposed to be a generation that believes in nothing, that valorizes revolt for its own sake. It is suggested that their idealism is coextensive with their personal and social dislocation, that the events of the “railway protest” were a rehearsal of a classical scenario—the age-old “generation gap.” This gulf between the young and the old is a constant of the human condition, a customary rite of passage in world history—boys and girls will revolt against their seniors; that is a fact of life. It is nothing new, and it will pass. Or, so we tend to believe.

They may not be the “young,” they may not be psychosomatic symptoms, they may not be figures of myth, abstract emblems of social contradiction. If they pledge allegiance to a certain heritage, it is not that of Freud’s pleasure principle but that of the French Revolution’s insistence on *citizenship*—they/we all are *citizens*. The right that they may invoke is possibly that of *the people*, a common and universal right that cuts beneath every objective classification. Solidarity has no regard for identity politics; egalitarianism effaces every margin that divides them from one another. This is precisely why their protest is addressed to *everyone without restriction*, why their appeal is an invitation to *every citizen*, young and old, local and foreign, insofar as they recognize themselves in it. The policemen are not their immediate adversaries, because their demand may go *beneath and beyond* the agents of social control.

What does this universality mean? Members of the establishment within the confines of parliamentary logic may have mistaken the problem entirely. Instead of confronting the limits of this logic, they thought it is the *only* means by which antagonistic interests can be arbitrated upon. It was said that “the youth” want representation in politics, that they wish to install an emissary or

two in the government who will embody their interests—another professional spokesperson, a participant in the interminable debates and discussions that comprise parliamentary deliberations. But, the problem may not lie in representation. It should be obvious that there is no deficit in representation, there is a *surplus* of it. The youth are *overexposed* as young men and women; everybody wants to offer a consolatory word, to lend a nurturing hand, to calm the clamor of adolescence. The hands that tore through the barriers enforced by the policemen may not be the hands of impetuous delinquents, they were bodies consecrated to an idea of justice. This justice cannot be obscured and dismissed by reference to a classical schema.

We may want to probe the contours of a paradox: their generation claims a large share of the responsibility for the railway protests, but they may not be a *youth movement*. If their voices and their bodies symbolize anything, it may not be the drama of pubescence but a collective aspiration for a *new world*. One may be right to suggest that they have a problem, but the vocabulary that one has developed thus far to evaluate it may be inadequate. There may not be a “youth problem.” Things are not what they seem.

We may want to look at *other* side of things, at *emergent* singularities, subterranean movements, imperceptible shifts that give the lie to commonplaces about today’s youth. The point is not to bemoan the prevailing state of affairs but to facilitate a stimulus to *create alternatives*, alternatives that are irreducible to the logic of the establishment. The task of creation is a mandate that imposes itself on *each of us* that has been touched by recent events. It is a collaborative effort, a collective construction of community. The process has only just begun, so it is difficult to say anything about it. It might not even go anywhere in the end, momentum is difficult to maintain, and Hong Kong society faces a whole plethora of obstacles, particularly the black holes of representation and the media, who want to short-circuit everything in advance by drowning out discussion in meaningless chatter. Certainly there is much to be desired as far as the Post-1980s



Group<sup>2</sup> goes. That is how it goes with any group, there are people of all kinds: glory-hunters, band-wagoneers, and aspiring celebrities of the avant-garde. But there are also things that inspire hope, for a good society, a good life.

What is, to invoke the august presence of Chairman Mao, the "principal contradiction" of our time, if not that magnificent metaphysical paradox of the subjective and the objective? We have been told, by no less than the foremost sociologists, that we live in a "risk society" in which all substantial solidary ties have been dissolved by the corrosive flow of capital. What results is a world where the right of the unbound individual is affirmed without limit, a spectacular conflagration that cuts the cords that once bound the human person to a cultural, religious or familial horizon, making everything a matter of "reflexive" choice. The power of this theory, when we read it alongside the indispensable propositions of Marx (2004a, b), lies in its sketching of an antinomy that reaches its zenith in postmodern life: coextensive with our times of uninhibited narcissism, characterized by the proliferation of New Age spiritualities, personal trainers, and self-help gurus, is the equally limitless power of deregulated capital that choreographs the minutiae of everyday life. The seemingly infinite right of the subjective corresponds to the infinite right of the objective. Yet this is not, as Adam Smith believed, a homeostatic, self-regulating order where the two poles check and balance one another. *Unfortunately for utopia, there are crises, and extraordinarily violent ones at that.*

Can this contradiction be resolved? And besides, is it really a contradiction in the simple sense? Is it not rather that subjective freedom is subordinate to objective freedom, the latter providing the guarantee as well as the unshakeable

limit of the former? So far, so Smith, if not for the fact that both poles of this equation are radically unstable in their intrinsic autonomy—history gives us plenty of evidence that the democratic individual (hubristic from the conservative point of view, glorious from the democratic one) can overstep the limit to the point of demanding its ultimate abolition, while the primacy of capital's objective laws can, in a state of emergency, suspend the realm of subjective right in the incontestable name of the sovereign market. Radical democracy and multinational Empire, this is the name of the asymmetrical, antagonistic non-relation, the irreconcilable tension that characterizes our global terrain. It is our desire to examine the strands of this knot which is wrapped firmly around the neck of our young.

Let us put forth one of the central theses of our essay, which takes its departure from this thought of the limit: the space that opens up this panorama of individual free choice is grounded on a primordial choice. One is free to choose among a plethora of secondary choices, insofar as one makes the primary choice of the field that makes all the choices available. As American incursions into "undemocratic" societies show us, this is the field of the free market. We should never forget that there can be no vacillation in the assumption of this choice—show a minute's hesitation and you will find yourself facing the barrel of a gun. In Sartre's words, we are "forced to be free"—having extorted its pound of flesh, the market compels us to defend it with our very lives. Should we be grateful that "life" persists despite all that, life that is lived at the extreme edges of endurance (down a few antidepressants), skating on the black ice of bankruptcy, tip-toeing upon the precipice that leads to unemployment? Or should we be more attentive to the flashes of another world that appear, like flares in the night, from cannonades manned by all of those who—having encamped themselves upon the shores of hope—resist with a desperate love?

Critical of mainstream sociology as we are, we remain faithful to one of its fundamental tenets: individual problems are, at one and the same time, social ones. Thus, we present a para-

<sup>2</sup>The name 'Post '80s Group' loosely designates a group of young activists who were active in struggles over the preservation of Lee Tung Street, the Star Ferry and Queens Ferry piers, as well as the protracted conflict over Choi Yuen Tsuen village, where an entire village was uprooted to make way for Hong Kong's express railway line to China. The group has now dissolved into a number of different, but complementary, projects.

dox of our own: this essay will, in our desperately “subjective” times, attempt to locate the objective forces at work in our societies, the traumatic effects of which are salved and masked by mass individualization. This, at the outset, undermines the suggestion that there is a “youth problem” that is isolable from the structure of the social at large. At the same time, we forego any “scientific” claim to empirical objectivity—the subjective space that we occupy is that of the nascent dissidence emerging in Hong Kong, guided by a passionate vision of social transformation. Inventing the objective within the subjective, wresting a new subjectivity from the dominant objectivity, that is our aim in this essay.

### A Provisional Program: Strides Towards a New Analysis of the Youth

A few programmatic declarations are in order, declarations that, through the drawing of limits and the clarification of principles, indicate our position regarding extant studies and supply a skeletal structure to the essay itself:

1. The “youth” in question in this essay is the Post-1980s Generation that, in our view, embodies an attempt to think through the major deadlocks of our sociohistorical landscape, as well as a concerted attempt to bore holes in its constitutive limits. It is this process of thought that we will delineate.
2. This “youth,” while susceptible to empirical, sociological treatment, attempts to undermine its particular place in the social structure by constructing an open plane upon which a transversal politics can take place. This is precisely the subjective dimension that every “objective” sociological analysis, which examines its object from the outside, misses entirely, taking as they do a topographical, “bird’s eye view” of society. What do we mean by a politics that is transversal? This political practice cuts across particular predicates, differences, and categories, “in-differentiating” them to the point where a universal commonality can be affirmed. This is a practice of egalitarianism that can be traced, genealogically, to the Jacobin citizen councils of the French Revolution. We can therefore say
3. that every given person is double—he/she is both a which (bearer of specific traits: age, gender, class, sociological) and a what (bearer of a citizenship that underlies and in-discriminates between these objective differences). We do not mean to say that one excludes the other by necessity but merely that either of these two faces assumes a relative primacy over the other in any given situation. We can think of the person as a hinge that tips—ever so slightly—toward either of these poles at a certain moment, without privileging either exclusively. This metaphor of *hinging*, tipping, or leaning, we must add, only goes so far, as it must never be forgotten that the very possibility of absolute equality among citizens can only be formulated if it is a primary condition that gives grounds to the predicates (gender, professional affiliation, class belonging) that are placed precariously upon it. So, we can say that there is a certain differentiation of *levels*.
4. To *think* the import of this transversal politics is also to think the transversal power of capital itself, which, in its globalized, neoliberal variant, registers its effects across the *entire* social strata without exception. Based upon the assumption that capital is *the* transcendental, overarching frame of contemporary life, a totality that forms a global network, we will attempt to theorize the “alter-globalist” sentiments espoused by many young activists.

This is to say that, as a founding gesture that opens the space for a new form of analysis, we turn our backs on all of the studies conducted by social workers, psychologists, sociologists, and other purported experts that examine the problems of the “youth” while excluding the social network/background that they are inscribed and ensconced within. What produces this spectacular ignorance, if not that these studies take, as their interpretative authority, the viewpoint of *society itself*, presuming to pass judgment upon a youth that they scarcely know? These experts, in their scarcely veiled desire to *conserve* the current order in all of its unquestioned legitimacy, hastily assume that the young *themselves share this desire for conservation*. We are justified in calling this a professional ventriloquism—putting words in

others' mouths, seeding desires in others' hearts. This step is inexcusable, and we can see that such studies are built upon several presuppositions that we question:

- (a) That an unproblematic "social body" exists, a systematic set of stable variables the seamless operation of which is largely uninterrupted by the malfunction of one of its parts (the youth).
  - (b) The "problem" of the youth does not have radical implicative effects on the social reality that it challenges.
  - (c) The symptomatic nature of this "problem" is strictly local and has no bearing on the *truth of society itself*. When treated properly, social reality as we know it will return to its seamless functioning. This is to exclude, at the very outset, a critique of the society in which such "problems" manifest themselves, cutting the chain of causality that binds a problem with its structural ground. We must be clear here: we do not accept the multiplication of causes and effects that circumscribe society into separate parts that have no bearing upon one another. The "youth problem" reveals a knot in social reality itself, a knot that we will attempt to unravel.
5. The blind spots of all said studies take root in a fantasy, an immemorial dream that functions, in Marx's terms, as real abstractions (Marx 2004a, b). This fantasy, inherited from modern sociology, is *society itself*. This fantasy is a very real blockage in the arteries of thought, and it shall receive critical treatment in the sections that follow.

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### **Society Is the Opium of the People: The Religiosity of the Social**

Before an endeavor to investigate the implications of the "youth problem" can commence, is it not imperative that we *demonstrate and verify the existence* of the youth? The fact that we are prepared to give credence to such a groundless proposition is itself cause for concern. Lest we are accused of semantic hairsplitting, we would like to prove that it is only through a rigorous decon-

struction of the problem's terms that we can arrive at its (disavowed) ideological subtext. What are the preconditions that permit us to designate this as a problem at all? To be succinct, what vantage point do we assume when we legislate upon its problematic nature? The obvious answer is that this "problem" threatens the equilibrium of our social substance itself—the discontent of the youth is the lacerating thorn in society's side, preventing it from achieving consummate closure.

This leads us to another series of questions, each of which warrants serious interrogation: what is the imaginary fantasy that supports this vision of an organic, friction-free society that has vanquished its antagonisms and deadlocks? The answer, again, is fairly straightforward: it is the fantasy prescribed and sustained by sociology itself. It comes as little surprise that, when we situate the genesis of sociology in its precise socio-historical conditions, the hidden complicity between sociology and government emerges into plain view: we should never forget that sociology was conceived amid the flames of a France consumed by political conflict (the Revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871). With this in mind, it would perhaps be no exaggeration to suggest that sociology, with its enthusiastic adoption and promulgation of the positivistic techniques employed by natural science, supplied the paradigmatic blueprint for today's predominant mode of governance, with its technocratic "administration of things" and trafficking of goods. What—if we can reduce sociology to a reductive formula—was the guiding principle of sociology, if not the integration of infinite individual rights into a holistic, organic social body, *society*?

In radically different ways, each of the "great" modern sociologists addressed the anguished laceration that Hamlet gave voice to in Shakespeare's fateful play: "The time is out of joint; O cursed spite/that I was ever born to set it right!" The paradox of this, of course, is that each of them hypothesized the emergence of a petrified social formula that would correct the aberrations of modernity—sociology would be an asymptotic approach towards a stable mechanism, the equilibrium of which could be restored by minor adjustments. Sociology, in this way, is synonymous with *technocracy*.

What are the consequences of this unreserved affirmation of positivity and its declamation of the negative as being an ephemeral residue of historical conditions that can be definitively overcome? From such a perspective, conflict is dismissed as being an epiphenomenal, “pathological” expression of social abnormality, a minor nuisance that can be corrected with managerial calibration. Political struggle is thus reduced to deviancy, an unfortunate malfunction in the social mechanism. Durkheim thus puts forth two propositions that are profoundly *moral* (in the Nietzschean sense) in nature: integration, consensus, and unity are the ends toward which politics tends; dissensus and antagonism are transitory symptoms, oblivious to their true object (social unity/wholeness) and their cause (the absence thereof). The parallels with Confucius are not altogether accidental.

For all of the proclamations that postmodernity marks a definitive break with the suppositions of modernity and its fanciful, totalizing abstractions, can we say that we have taken our leave of this imaginary? In a disquieting way, the predictions that this line of prophets proclaimed have given shape to contemporary reality. With the disappearance of the cleavage that split the world in two, the last symbolic remainder of which was the Berlin Wall, capital circulates in an untrammelled space, enjoying an unprecedented hegemony. The unquestioned eminence of capital can be evidenced by identifying two telling symptoms: the thorough *depoliticization* of the market, obscuring the centrality of *political economy* in Marxist analysis, and the subordination of every other social concern beneath the sovereignty of capital.

The signs of both symptoms are not difficult to discern—now that capital forms the transcendental horizon of contemporary activity, having extracted itself from the litigious field of contestation as such, political struggle manifests itself in a plethora of “identity politics,” each of which operates largely on the superstructural domain of culture, and largely at the exclusion of the others. As for the second, its tragic obviousness culminated in the inability of world leaders to reach a satisfying consensus in the recent climate talks in

Copenhagen, an astonishing reticence that stands in stark contrast to the immediate state of emergency following the financial meltdown of 2008.

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### **Sense with Sense: The Structure of Consensus, the Eminence of the Media, and the Case of Christina Chan**

If “society” is the fantasy scene staged within the overarching frame that capital opens up, how is this fantasy screened and reproduced, if not through the media? Does this not require us to examine the workings of ideology in its most advanced form, the *spectacle*? The political philosopher Jacques Ranciere (2009) has said that we live in a “consensus society,” a society that, in his lucid definition, “conjoins sense with sense.” What this means is that we live in a world saturated with a *surplus* of meaning, such that meaning, in an astonishing turn of events, manages to *precede* that which it explains. Meaning is always held in reserve, so that we never confront the unsettling meaninglessness of sense without its accompanying elucidation. In this way, every word, image, and sign is tethered, by a seemingly inextricable cord, to its signification. This is why sense (raw auditory or visual sensation) is always-already conjoined with sense (the meaning that “makes sense” of sensation). This seemingly convoluted, tautological claim is not difficult to understand, it merely hinges on the production of meaning through the stitching of a sign (a signifier) with its signified (meaning), hiding the cleavage between these two halves, the movement that we must make from one to the other before “comprehending” a sign and integrating it into a meaningful reality. How does this happen, if not for the monopoly of the informational and mediatic networks that give shape to our reality, the “facts” that constitute and condition our understanding of it? Put bluntly, the “media” is the name that we assign to the shadowy architects of reality, those untiring construction workers of meaning hard at work in the smoldering factories of consensus. This image of the factory is not at all metaphorical—the media *commodifies* reality in a very real sense by mak-

ing it digestible, ready for general, popular consumption. Reality is a narrative, a continuous film reel that gratifies precisely because it "makes sense," having undergone surgery upon the operating tables of the editing room.

How does this bear upon our sociohistorical situation and, more specifically, the "youth problem" that emerges at the interstices, the fractures of consensus? A cursory aside would be of help at this moment. We are all familiar with the personalization of various members of the Post-1980s collective, reducing them to a set of individualized avatars, each of which represents an ideal "distillation" of the youth problem, its social origins and its grievances. A recent issue of *Yazhou Zhoukan* published a series of profiles on prominent members of the Post-1980s group, biographical analyses attempting to map the inchoate, protean dissent of the group to a set of discernible values, bodies, and faces. This is a subtle police operation, no less, which seeks to solicit speech from this shadowy body, short-circuiting the unsettling mystery of its silence. Individualized, social demands become expressions of individualized idiosyncrasies, identitarian "points of view" stripped of their universal import. In the case of Christina Chan, the media has launched an invasive inquiry into her personal life, juxtaposing her insurrectionary ardor with her wanton lifestyle.

Here, the tactics employed by the media have been twofold, playing on both sides at once, while sharing a common function: "serious-minded" magazines and radio stations around the city have welcomed Christina Chan's comments on the recent protests, giving her free room to articulate her views without restraint. In effect, she is thereby elected by the media networks as the movement's privileged orator. Meanwhile, tabloids offset the gravity of these magazines, deflating the lofty hauteur of Christina Chan's declamations by publishing photographs of her half-naked body. There is, in reality, no disjunction between these two convergent facets of the media operation, two faces of the same phenomenon.

On the one hand, Christina Chan is called upon to enter a debate, submitting her opinion as

one perspective among many. What does a debate presuppose, if not a "neutral ground" upon which different perspectives can be negotiated in a peaceful fashion, as so many "points of view" belonging to so many esteemed personnel?

So, through a sleight of hand, Christina Chan is admitted into the gates of the media spectacle insofar as she signs an unspoken, unwritten contract that she accepts the reduction of her declarations to another "angle" (how television audiences, those discerning fetishists of the reconciliation between subjective myopia and the objective "big picture" staged by the media, love the kaleidoscopic complexity of things) on an irreducibly polydimensional social problem. This is but another variant of that famed prefatory proviso that accompanies every television production: "The views expressed are those of the speaker and not those of the station." In other words, participation in the media spectacle requires, as price of admission, two simultaneous avowals that mutually reinforce one another: an unreserved assumption of responsibility for the particularity of one's views as well as a full endorsement of the innocuous neutrality of the ground upon which those views will be aired. In one stroke, the properly *theatrical* dimension of the media scene is naturalized, while the power relations that choreograph this pantomime are hidden altogether. Supplementing this is the tourniquet that completes the operation, draining any scraps of universality that persist in the interview format—the photographic image of Christina Chan's nubile body supply a subtext that is nakedly suggestive, indexing all of the affects, the clamorous appeals to social transformation, the tears shed on behalf of Hong Kong (owing, it seems, to a rather mawkish disposition) to *this* fallen, compromised body. It is at this point that we can *locate* and *localize* the dissent of our young, numbing the impact that it has on the consensual image of reality by fixing it upon a determinate, isolable place. By analogy, was the financial crisis not handled in *exactly the same fashion* (the blame does not lie with the *system itself*, but the unchecked ambitions of *some* unscrupulous profiteers, the destructive greed of banks that



lent money to “homeflippers” everywhere...)? We can say, then, that the appearance of a strong difference with universal consequences (prohibited by the laws of appearance that constitute our current order) is collapsed into the lateral series of weak differences that characterize so many equivalences, so many atomized particularities. To emphasize the foreignness of these aspirations to the general public, we are told that Christina Chan enjoys long walks on the beach, exchanging all manner of inappropriate caresses and lusty gazes with her Caucasian boyfriend. From hereon out, Christina Chan can be regarded as a mannequin, a media puppet dancing for public amusement.

Is this not a succinct dramatization of the principal thesis of this essay: the conjunction of sense through sense, the disavowal of the modern revolution of the Cartesian subject by *identifying and indexing the subject to its predicates*, the reduction of all intensities, all differences, to weak differences (idiosyncratic points of view that are ultimately equivalent and exchangeable to one another), the maintenance of a world in which the crucial questions of our time are subject to radical indeterminacy, splintered into innumerable “world views”? *Our world is a world where perpetual debate and deliberation are encouraged, as long as the point where decision is required is evaded indefinitely.* This proposition, of course, does little to change the fact that, on a fundamental level, the principal decisions (concerning the economy, the environment) *have already been made for us*: this space for debate is merely one where we can register our complaints, our objections, and our moral indignation, all of which Power is not in the least obliged to take into account.

The question at this point is: despite the supposed indeterminacy and the complexity that this world likes to remind us of at every instant, an indeterminacy that inhibits us from *claiming the right to decide* about a collective fate that is in the exclusive hands of a dominant oligarchy, how does *order* nevertheless come about? How have we created a world in which genuine emergencies (ecological crisis) are subject to radical doubt, debate, and vacillation, while the unmiti-

gated reign of free market capital is exempt from any disputation whatsoever? Is this not the question of ideology?

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## A Note on Ideology

We have already seen that one dominant element (capital), which opens the *space* for change, must *itself be rendered both inconspicuous and immune from change*, serving as the hidden legislative principle that judges the existence/inexistence of changes and differences. Changes are screened through this principle, and there are always those intransigent incompatibles that do not pass through the sieve. Each of us knows, to a greater or lesser extent, the degree to which willful disavowal and repression are necessary to make everyday life supportable—if we were conscious of the immense human suffering that underlies our quotidian activities, the blood that greases the gears of our frictionless indifference, we would be incapacitated altogether. In the same way, capital, through the construction of an *exclusive* window on truth, knowledge, and meaning, polices the regulation of truths and knowledges. Once more, it arbitrates upon existence and inexistence, framing the terms by which debate is carried out.

To give but one example of ideology at work, we can look at the media’s treatment of the use of “violence,” both on the part of the police, custodians of order, and the impetuous young, in recent demonstrations. It is our opinion that there is something profoundly symptomatic about these representations, symptoms that are indicative of several key tenets of contemporary consensuality. We are all familiar with public condemnations, supplied by “experts” of all varieties who lay claim to the “voice of reason” in all of its lucid sobriety, of the “undemocratic” spontaneous methods of our idealistic “delinquents.” At the same time, a cleavage is drawn between the law and its willful transgressors.

What is this gulf? On one side of this schism, we find the legitimate use of violence on the part of the State, guaranteed by a public interest—implicit in the social contract itself—in the

defense of civic order. On the other, there are the undisciplined, "irrational" outbursts of those who have not submitted themselves to the reality principle of patient dialogue, dialogue that, as their interlocutors are no doubt aware, is exclusively weighted in favor of a dominant consensus. Situating ourselves within this consensus, such impatience must be tempered by the discipline of reason, the abandonment of any passionate partisanship in favor of neutral "democratic" arbitration. Yet, what if we regard this supposed recklessness as a blow struck against the very frame of dialogue itself, an exposure of its clear inadequacy? What is obvious here is that there are "legitimate" forms of democracy—those expressly endorsed and administered by the powers-that-be- and "illegitimate" forms of democracy—populist, spontaneist, ungrounded in the rules that codify proper political conduct and etiquette in contemporary life. This is not to sanction any and all uses of violence in the name of resistance, merely the insistence that they cannot be properly understood if we accept, without reservation, the unshakeable parameters of neutral communication without placing the *very medium of communication under intense scrutiny*. Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian media theorist, was already unequivocal about this—in our societies, the medium *is* the message. Sometimes, the content of an act is a rejection of the form, the framework it is inscribed in.

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### **Hong Kong, Neoliberalism, and Its Ideal State**

Wherefore Hong Kong, then, a city that enjoys a double/contradictory status, being, at one and the same time, a tributary of Communist China as well as boasting the freest market economy in the world? Juxtaposing the governance of Hong Kong against those of China and the United States, we can see that the political legitimacy of the SAR government is in an ambivalent, anomalous position. Is it possible to speak of a "legitimation crisis" (Habermas) in Hong Kong when there is no legitimacy to speak of? The SAR Government is generally regarded as a makeshift

transplant grafted upon the city, a managerial outpost that coordinates affairs in a manner best suited to sustain the massive flux of goods, talent, and money that surges through its waters. In compensation for this, the government offers the standard neoliberal promise of a progressive, quasi-Rawlsian "trickle-down" effect that will, in due time, reach the very bottom of the pyramid, the underclass. We have seen that this messianism of the market works ideological miracles as long as people continue to believe in it. A mercantile, cipher-like function, then, which reveals, in a truly illustrative way, the regulative ideal of a free market state, which realizes (in a cruelly ironic way) Marx's (2004a, b) utopian vision of a post-revolutionary government reduced to the mere "management of things."

It is no coincidence, then, that this thoroughly deregulated flow of capital is accompanied, as though they were inexpugnable prerequisites, by tremendous discrepancies in income, the long delay in legislating a minimum wage, disproportionate representation of financial interests within the legislative council, a steady foundation of exploited domestic services (maids, cooks, and helpers), and an invisible substratum of immigrant labor. Far from being aberrancies that the city can conceivably correct without altering, in an irrevocable way, its structural coordinates, the intimate complicity between this supposed "contradiction" has been laid bare throughout the neoliberal world, which has retrenched and revoked most of the funds devoted to public spending throughout the Keynesian years. As such, any expectations that these issues can be satisfactorily addressed from *within* the existing system are tacitly tantamount to a demand that the system is restructured altogether.

This is not, despite the authorities' implorations to be "realistic," a matter of starry-eyed utopianism. On the contrary, such a proposition hinges on two incontrovertible historical developments that undermine any naïve optimism regarding a "return" to the social security of yesteryear: the advent of globalization and the emergence of a global order composed of transnational trade agreements, the consequence of which is the *inseparability* of each nation state from the mul-

tifarious transnational interconnections that traverse it and constitute its affairs. This is to suggest that China is herself master of her own houses, dominant players in a structural totality that, in a very real sense, eludes their command. Can it be said, then, that late capitalism, having availed itself of the illusions pertaining to the “captains of industry” that Weber celebrated so energetically, is an impersonal master without identifiable masters? Does this rehash Marx’s supposition (2004a, b), so recently revived by the powerful work of Moishe Pastone, that capitalism is a transpersonal subject without subjects, a historical impulse that, despite being nothing other than the cumulative, coordinated actions of the world peoples, escapes the control of all of them? Insofar as the profit motive has been given ample ground to sediment and propagate itself without limit, having annihilated the dams that protected against its untrammelled deluge, we are compelled to affirm the rather dour hypothesis that there is, at the present moment, no conceivable means to fashion a robust and sustainable capitalism through neoliberal methods.

Compounding matters is the suppressed truth that neoliberalism is indeed the hegemonic schema of contemporary life, an order assembled from heterogeneous interlocking parts, all of which cohere into a working whole (capitalism and Confucianism in China, capitalism and Hinduism in India, capitalism, Zen, and Shinto in Japan...). These seemingly disparate cultural differences, attesting to idiosyncrasies that cannot be successfully reconciled by an overarching order, have been engineered into a protean whole that (as far as the exigencies of the moment go) works. Felix Guattari has coined a very apt description of this working whole: *Integrated World Capitalism* (IWC). One could also venture to say that it is these very cultural particularities that obscure the fact that there is an abiding oneness, a structural homogeneity that binds and galvanizes all of these parts into a truly universal order. In this regard, capitalism can be fractured into multiple capitalisms, each of which are irreducible to the other, expressing a unique national trait that offsets and distinguishes each nation from the other. This is why nationalism (“Anything the decadent Americans can do, we, with our

unflinching family values and codes of honor, can do much better!”) can function as the imaginary and symbolic edifice that sustains a free market economy. There is absolutely no contradiction in this haphazard conjunction of the global and the particular, in a nation’s impassioned participation in a global market through the mobilization of “archaic” nationalistic chauvinism. So, if neoliberal capital constitutes the transcendental frame for all of these imaginary and symbolic compositions (as we have seen with our discussions on change, epistemology, temporality, technology, and ecology), then it becomes clear that the effects proper to its functioning cannot be overcome on its own terms. The unanimity of the global response to the economic crisis is depressingly evident when we examine the reactions of both the United States and Hong Kong—a timorousness in regard to public spending, a taciturnity regarding aid to the unemployed, the retrenched and citizen casualties of the stock market (thereby sinking the disenfranchised into a bottomless quicksand of debt), and an unreserved haste in bailing out banks that should have been left either to their inevitable bankruptcy or state seizure. The proposed panacea, then, is that of Wagner’s *Parsifal*: “The spear that smote you shall be the spear that heals you.” The supremacy of neoliberalism is demonstrably certain: in times of crisis, imaginative solutions are dismissed in lieu of the malefactor that inflicted the wound. It is these complementary illusions of the isolable nation state from the transnational network it is inscribed in, the revocability of the neoliberal turn, and the plausibility of a revitalized welfare state that the right, the center, and the left must abandon for good.

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### **Long Live the Temporary Contract! Precarity and the Neoliberal Organization of Work**

Examining the immediate costs of neoliberalization, one can cite the profound metamorphoses of labor, rendering precarious and superfluous a large proportion of the workforce through a combination of mass mechanization and management methods that strive to optimize efficiency while

minimizing on the costs of skilled labor. The expendability of a good number of the workforce below the bar of middle (and in some cases, upper) management became self-evident in the wake of the financial crisis, and those who retained their jobs were forced to either accept lower wages or work overtime, threatened as they were by the ominous presence of the swelling legions of the newly unemployed. Long live the temporary contract!

Among the city's young, we can notice a pronounced bifurcation of attitudes toward work: a heightened anxiety about one's employability, leading to the feverish acquisition of all manner of "life skills" (languages, technical and managerial knowhow, lessons in etiquette, social prudence, networking [professional sycophancy], golf, art appreciation and elocution, all of which constitute an "all-rounded" executive), referrals, and "work experience" that would make one more competitive in the ever-evolving work pool, which, as it downsizes towards a streamlined leanness, is becoming more and more discriminating/discriminatory in its employment criteria. On the other hand, we have a growing number of young people who have become disaffected with work. Among the *petit bourgeoisie*, some drop out of the workforce entirely and form clusters of the new bohemia in artist communes and squatters, playing music, writing novels, experimenting with politics, or making films while working occasional odd jobs. Others resort to petty crime, theft and drug peddling, while a good many choose to remain unemployed altogether. It would be easy to say that these young people are the unfortunate detritus of affluence, indolent progeny of the Sexual Revolution, the Internet, the credit card, and MTV. Nothing could be simpler than comparing them to their industrious predecessors: the baby boomers, their parents, the dot com yuppies of Generation X, and the stock market sharks of finance capital. This brood of Bartlebies quite simply refuses to participate in the world as it is, and even the ludic, postmodern Google-Microsoft models of flexible hours, on-site organic food eateries, and relaxed dress codes cannot implore them to return to the plump bosom of work. Anyway, we have all seen what happens when the demarcations between work and play dissolve

into indiscernibility, and "creative work" is driven by the lash of profit—creativity becomes a super-ego injunction, a relentless command to produce without cessation. Creative action, that once produced *its own time* and proceeded at its own pace, is now wired to the pulsating mainframe of commodity production, having to keep pace with the acceleration of turnover rates, the unabating, unforgiving velocity of competition.

Have we not seen this in the commodification of knowledges, the commodification of *philosophy itself* within the confines of the academy, so much so that innumerable books and articles are turned out in accordance to the "burning topics" of the present moment, research subjects that are dictated by the whims of the market? Little wonder that the institutions that once promised a sanctuary for the time of thought, nurseries for the grand culture of cosmopolitan intellect, are being spurned by intelligent young people across the spectrum, who seek more direct ways of satiating the yen of their eager minds without placing them at the mercy of fashion and profit. Ransacked and pillaged by state functionaries in the service of money, the truly *universal* vocations of the university (the humanities, the social sciences, various branches of sciences and pure mathematics, the arts) are purged and stripped of funding, generously allocated to the business and law schools to spawn a new generation of mercenaries forsworn to the defense of private property, the avaricious individual and the impoverished particularity of monetary interest.

This much is apparent: when work spills over into life and the time of production becomes any time at all, we get the model worker, fuelled on an inexhaustible supply of biopower—a Blackberry-toting executive with ideas perpetually fomenting in his espresso-wired brain; a highly motivated, ultra-productive handyman with a winning smile, an adaptability to all manner of social protocols; a willing team player who gives his all at every given moment, making productive use of every available neuron in his formidable, Botoxed cranium, thanks to a regimented diet of organic fruits, vitamin water, and half marathons. In short, this ideal servant is *always on call*—he is always reachable by e-mail or telephone! In such conditions, where one is forced to

choose between accepting a life of unremitting, perpetual mobilization or starvation, it is not so surprising that many refuse the choice altogether, committing suicide or its social equivalent, dropping out.

### **“Alter-Globalization” and the Splitting of the Consensual One**

Keeping all this in mind, we can begin to think of the “alter-globalist” sentiments espoused by many of our young men and women, sentiments that, because of their intransigently universal mode of address, subvert the idea that they are epiphenomenal expressions of youthful idealism or anomic discontent. The former can be explained and sublimated by way of the Oedipus complex, while the latter, a sociological category formulated by Durkheim and Giddens (1972), can be treated and inoculated by the management methods wielded by social work and the bureaucrats of social science. What, in the last reckoning, does “alter-globalization” mean, if not that it too agrees, alongside capitalism, that we live in one world? Yet this should not be read to mean that it shares common ground with capitalism, that there can be some sort of dialectical reconciliation between the powers-that-be and those who oppose it. In philosophical terms, we might say that the One of the world (constituted, it must be said, with the help of the market) has been cleaved into Two irreconcilable conceptions of this One, inasmuch as this difference is no longer recuperable nor sustainable within the One of today’s hegemonic order. We can also say that this One has been split from within by its own impossibility, its inexorable difference from itself. This antagonistic scission, it seems to us, is becoming as decisive as it is irreparable as time progresses, as activists begin to rediscover the primacy of collective politics, a grassroots politics that takes its leave of both the procedures of parliamentary arbitration/electioneering as well as the popular appeal to the state.

What does it mean to say that the One of the world is divided into Two oppositional conceptions of this One? A cursory review of the guiding arguments of this essay would, we think,

provide an augury of the answer. In simple terms, it can be taken to mean that because the one world we live in is structured in such a way that repercussions reverberate across all of its points, the concentration of legislative and executive power in the hands of a privileged few, particularly when this power is oriented in the direction of profit generation, is to be opposed without reserve. The affirmation “there is only one world” can be read in two disjunctive fashions, each of which, precisely because it is an affirmation of the One, excludes the other by necessity. On the side of one extreme, there is only the world that follows the dictates of finance capital and the free market: a world premised upon violent exclusions, relations of power that are policed by force and cunning, nationalistic chauvinisms, the conversion of bodies and minds into “human capital,” the conflagration of universal property (artistic creation, philosophical creation, scientific creation, the production of medical and technical knowledges) via mass privatization and copy-righting and widening discrepancies in income. A world of multiculturalist “respect for difference” that merely tolerates the Other’s right to bare existence, entertaining his/her outlandish customs and practices only insofar as it does not infringe upon my personal space or offend my timorous sensibilities. A world that is fragmented and atomized into innumerable intimate private spaces (class spaces, familial spaces, national spaces, cultural spaces, generational spaces) that do not communicate with one another, where differences are instituted, kept apart in such a manner that they do not contaminate one another by contact.

The other side, which we will attempt to theorize with the help of Alain Badiou’s remarkable philosophy, chooses to take the affirmation of the oneness of the world in an absolutely literal fashion. The One is neither natural nor self-evident; it is a collective creation of time and space that cuts transversally across the frontiers of particular difference, rejecting the partitions that prohibit the formation of any concerted collective solidarity. It is an unremitting affirmation of egalitarian belonging that attenuates the particularity of individuality in order for the point of the universal to surface. Above all else, it differentiates itself



from the dominant mode of politics (what many political theorists of all ideological persuasions have called "post-politics") of reconciliation, parliamentary negotiation (tacit acceptance of the rules that govern such procedures), and peaceful arbitration in the interests of social cohesion and Confucian harmony. Politics of this order assumes full responsibility for the partisanship that results from antagonism.

Seen in this way, the monicker "Post-1980s" is not so much a mobilization of a generational gap, which would be ripe carrion for sociological vultures and psychiatrists of all stripes, as an empty signifier that operates like the manifestos of yesterday's avant-gardes—they, the young, are absolutely modern, they are acutely conscious of the tasks that the moment asks of us. Another paradox, then: the young of today are, at once, *timely and untimely*. They embody an effort to respond, through the elaboration of a *new* mode of thinking and doing, to the exigencies that our time presents to them. At the same time, they create an opening towards a future, a radical possibility that is *inconceivable* from within the horizon that today's neoliberal configuration provides us with. This time, stitching together the explosiveness of the present with the openness of the future, is *totally distinct* from the closed and repetitive time of late capitalism, with its desperate attempts to conserve and rescue itself from systematic collapse. Put in another way, we can say that the Post-1980s Group is attempting to accomplish the *re-socialization* of space-time, liberating a new trajectory of creative possibility from within the *automatism* of the market.

Now that the narcotics of narcissism and the soporifics of self have lost their value, perhaps it is time that we took our leave of our prolonged neurosis, shedding the skin of the victim crushed by a cruel world. Sisyphus makes a place for Prometheus, and the vitality of politics, forbidden by the Law that petrifies it, gives shape to our dreams. Dreamers amid the circular ruins—yes, this recalls that beautiful story by Borges that recounts a tired old magician's sustained attempts to dream a new man, engendering a new hope in the heart of darkness. An inflammable body that can pass through a blazing temple unharmed; a dream body that, forged from the furnaces of an imagination hot with love, gives

the lie to the physical laws that rivet us to the rock of necessity. Old before our time, prematurely senile, having outworn the threadbare formulas that gave our fathers passage to the caves of bloodstained treasure, we are the belated ones in search of a new life.

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## Main Findings: A Few Theses

### 1. *Society, as a consensual space, does not exist.*

This chapter begins from a simple hypothesis that will doubtless strike the reader as being rather odd: society does not exist. To elucidate our point, it would be necessary to qualify this statement with a clarification of its terms. "Society," for us, is but another incarnation of the metaphysics of the One and the Whole. We tend to conceive of society as a unitary organism, a coordinated space shared by a spectrum of social actors, produced and reproduced by their collective efforts. Yet this very body is kept apart by an antagonism that prevents it from ever becoming a self-identical Whole. This is why, in classical philosophical terms, society does not *exist* as a fully realized entity, it is always marked by a lack of being that it cannot overcome. It is this gap that prevents the social from stitching the gaping wound that it bears at its heart, which provides the condition for politics, which we understand as a *civic display of popular dissent*.

### 2. *Popular politics has little to do with the "managerial necessities" of the state.*

Of course, our definition of the political flies in the face of the prevalent understanding of politics today, which seems to designate a specialized sphere of activity left to professional bureaucrats and technocrats of various stripes. As such, the state's attempt to open a space for dialogue with the Post-1980s Generation misses what recent displays of civil disobedience call into question. In regarding the youth as another regional "interest group" clamoring for a greater slice of the revenue circulating through the city, as another underrepresented minority demanding greater recognition in the legislature, the state has yet to grasp the point. One cannot assume anymore that money and work are the only things left to squabble about these days.

3. *The impossibility of society and the impossibility of the market are isomorphic.*

If things were so, society *would* exist as a self-perpetuating value-generating mechanism that would only require intermittent calibrations and adjustments. This, however, is hardly a workable hypothesis, being a fantasy that cannot be sustained for long: as the recent financial crisis has shown, even a seemingly frictionless free market will run up against its own internal contradictions, leading to spectacular implosions that it can only hope to defer interminably. For so long, the spectral world of financial speculation seemed to offer a miraculous solution to the cul-de-sacs of the “real economy” of production.

4. *Political antagonism creates a breach between two dissymmetrical logics.*

So, the question has to be raised: what, then, do our young people want? Do recent protests attest, in an ominous fashion, to fermenting discontents that are no longer explicable by a sociological schema that reduces political demands to particular group interests? It is our belief that conservative sociology, which tends to index political claims to particular sectors of society, confusing the political subject with the position one occupies in the social strata, is incapable of thinking about the singular dynamics of political events, which *overflow* the categories and demarcations by which social space is organized. Simply put, it is the *very logic* by which procedures are conducted and the power relations that structure them in advance that are being contested in public space. It is necessary to emphasize, in Arendtian fashion, the *public* and *communal* nature of these political concerns as the gap between the state and the citizen subsists.

5. *To politicize an issue is to reject the privatization of the commons.*

Put in this way, we can regard political action as a means of restoring privatized concerns to the public realm of popular contestation. Politics is an affirmation of the *litigious* nature of issues that are decided by the state, with the civic body repossessing the right of decision that had been removed from it.

6. *The primacy of the market has become a question once more.*

Little wonder, then, that many of today's struggles concern the sphere that has been *put out of play* altogether by governments the world over, the market that has been deregulated just as much as it has been depoliticized. The economy is thus transformed into an unnamable, untouchable idol, to be regarded with reverence and awe. One would not be naïve enough to contest the ubiquity of the economy. In fact, we passionately believe in its centrality, something that will become clear in our analyses, which chart the profound effects that neoliberal policy have exerted upon social life and contemporary subjectivity. Like a generative matrix, the logic of capital produces a world unto itself. It is this world that we take as the object of our scrutiny.

7. *The apathy of our youth towards work should be taken in an affirmative sense.*

Naturally, all of this debunks all of the mythologies of the youth, from the generation gulf to the Oedipal schema. We can, however, offer a faint defense of the “generation gulf,” which supplies a graphic rendering of the seemingly insuperable chasm that has opened up between the disaffected young of today and their industrious parents. It is a common belief that today's young men and women are turning their noses against all forms of hard work and sacrifice. We fail to see why this should be taken, without further forethought, as a criticism. If it is indeed an accurate description of today's youth and the problems that they pose to a world that cannot accommodate them, an intelligent response would be to address these problems on their own terms. The problem here, of course, is that even the highly flexible, mobile jobs offered by today's “creative industries” are no longer lucrative enough to satisfy our youth. It would be risky not to recognize that this disbelief in the value of work is at the heart of contemporary struggles over the future. Saying this, we anticipate that the very nature of work and its primacy in everyday life will have to be reevaluated altogether in the near future.

## Policy Suggestions

### 1. *Universal wage*

It has taken our city rather long to institute a minimum wage. Still, we are well aware that all is not as paradoxical as it seems—the astronomical wealth of some goes hand in hand with the near-limitless exploitation of others. We are, however, not about to speak of exploitation here. Rather, we are concerned with something more advanced than the workplace wage. At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves, we would suggest that the minimum wage is simply not enough, as it continues to be rooted in the division between “productive” (wage labor) and “unproductive” work. One of the key problems of today’s economy, one which stymies mainstream economists and Marxists alike, is the question of where value comes from. For our part, we would say that today’s economy is more problematic than ever—property developers capitalize on scenic territories or locales that are saturated with cultural history, paying little for either the landscape or the generations that have made a neighborhood worth living in. In today’s “cognitive capitalism,” where ideas and images alike are seized and commodified into capital, the notions of authorial ownership and intellectual property have to be reconsidered. In today’s world, where the ideas that circulate between friends and networks are captured and appropriated by those who contributed little to their inception, it is illegitimate to say that the unemployed produce nothing whatsoever. It is also illegitimate to say that those who drift out of the workforce will spend their days in idleness. Indeed, original concepts, knowledges and works of art are more often than not produced at a leisurely pace, freed from the unsparing duress of deadlines and turnover times. It is for these very reasons that a universal wage is in order.

### 2. *Food for everyone*

For the last 50 years, Cuba has provided all of their citizens with a minimum food basket. We

believe that this can be done here, though this ties in to our next point.

### 3. *Anybody who works here belongs here*

We must honor and salute the men and women who work tirelessly in the shadows to build our infrastructures and our buildings. There is little reason why young immigrants, Chinese, Pakistani, Filipinos, Indonesians and Nepalese should be subject to any form of discrimination. Our city owes as much to construction workers, cleaners, security guards and night-watchmen as they do to financiers that stream through the revolving doors of our economy. The government has, of course, attempted to implement plans to “integrate” and aid Chinese migrants in their assimilation to the norms and mores of Hong Kong society, but shouldn’t this be a reciprocal process? The marginalization of these migrants should be made visible to all, so that the prejudice that lies underneath Hong Kong society can be exposed to the Other upon which this city is built.

### 4. *Universal health care*

The philosopher Alain Badiou calls this the “Hippocratic point,” and it would do us well to quote this passage from *The Meaning of Sarkozy*: “Any sick person who asks for a doctor to treat them should be examined and treated as well as possible, in the present conditions of medicine as the doctor understands these, and unconditional with respect to age, nationality, “culture,” administrative status or financial resources...Today, before treating a patient, it is first necessary to consider the state of the economy, the funds of the hospital, the hierarchy of services, the origin of the patient, whether they are black or white, their resources, identity papers, and so on. The question of health and the medical function is in the process of being absorbed by budgetary considerations, the border police and social discrimination...It bears on the very definition of medicine. We should be reminded most energetically of the Hippocratic Oath.” (Badiou, pp. 49–50)

### 5. *Extensive educational reform*

The neoliberalization of the education system has made its effects felt across the entire

spectrum of student life, from the preschool academies and the kindergartens to university postgraduate programs. Why are boys and girls of today at the tender ages of five and six made to attend all manner of “self-improvement” classes that throw them headfirst into the perpetual pursuit of heightened “employability.” The struggle of all against all is, it seems, our destiny from infancy onwards. It is difficult to understand why primary and secondary school teachers have been reduced to automatons that are tasked to reproduce, in perfectly mechanical fashion, a set of standardized/codified rubrics developed by the examination body. The unhappiness of many teachers in Hong Kong is well established. The tuition centers that have sprouted across the city are a case in point. It is well known that these institutions do little in the way of fostering any sort of individual initiative in their students, and it is perhaps to their credit that they do not make a pretense of doing so. Rather, they drill their students intensively in examination strategies, reducing languages and the humanities to a set of applied formulae. One of the consequences of this is the lamentable standard of English in the city. This city has, we believe, the dubious honor of being one of the few former English colonies that have not produced a noteworthy English-speaking poet, essayist, philosopher or novelist.

The situation of our universities is no less obvious. Though there are a good many young people who devote their time to the humanities, the arts and the sciences, not only do these departments receive considerably less funding than the faculties of medicine and law, engineering and business, their chances of finding rewarding work after graduation are meager. Meanwhile, different faculties are left to vie with one another for whatever money there is to be had. What does Hong Kong have to show for all this, besides generation after generation of lawyers, doctors, accountants, bankers?

6. *“Where have all the flowers gone?”*

“Where have all the flowers gone,” or where have all the young people in Hong Kong gone? Where do they spend their time and what do

they typically do on an average day, and night? If they have something important or not so important to say, who would (and would not) listen, and with what consequences, to them and to society? It is vitally important that the youth of Hong Kong today are supported and nurtured by the state and society toward community-building—and carving out a niche, a space, a forum by themselves, for themselves, among themselves. It is in this space, which could both be scattered across various local districts and neighborhoods as ones’ natural habitat, and concentrated in popular urban areas or public places where people gravitate and congregate, where youth of all sorts and kinds, be they artists or engineers, workers or professionals, boys or girls, bankers and unemployed, mix, communicate, dialogue, understand, sympathize, emphasize, imagine, create, help, contribute, dream. When they are dreaming, chatting, fantasizing—in fusion—it is best that society does not look down upon them as idle, unproductive labor. Who says working hard, making money, climbing the corporate ladder, being conformist, docile, obedient, is the only game in town? Who says leisure, idleness (Bertrand Russell wrote quite a bit on “in praise of idleness”), pondering, meditation about the future of our city, is less valuable, less desirable, less productive, than building homes, building capital, building networks? Society must provide the young with both physical and virtual spaces so that they could express themselves and be heard. In the 1960s, there were newspapers, magazines, community centers, movie houses for the youth who had over the years constructed a distinctive social discourse on society, politics, art, esthetics, the “East” and the “West”, culture, the nature, identity, democracy, freedom, existentialism, pragmatism—and, most importantly, on themselves, their own futures, their collective futures, all in plurality, not singularity. Where have they all gone? Where have all the flowers gone?

7. *Is work meaningful to the youth anymore?*

The government and society would need to quickly reflect on the connection between the sort of education offered to the youth and the

kind of work available to them. Does Hong Kong society value and honor a particular category of work while devaluing, even stigmatizing other categories? Is our society pluralistic enough for locals, foreigners, and returnees to each work according to their own needs, desires, and talents? Has there been a rise and demise of "the creative class," an apt term of Richard Florida? If it is true that society must look to the youth for creativity and innovation, are we (mis)treating their activities or conduct as creativity of the wrong kind, a kind of deviance, even delinquency? Is society ready to talk about the functions of various modes of "deviance," including ritualism, retreatism, withdrawal, and rebellion, following the sociologist Robert Merton, which may well be "productive labor" or least creative responses to their strains and stresses of life? The government must find ways to understand how and what the young in Hong Kong think about work in a capitalistic society in a globalized world.

8. *Whither the family?*

Are the youth in Hong Kong questioning, perhaps even rejecting, their parents' values on and attitudes toward education, work, marriage, and having children? Parents, especially those of an immigrant background, may well be right in complaining about their children, unlike themselves a mere generation ago, not working hard enough in school and at work. Parents also grumble about their children spending too much time surfing the Internet, hiding and vanishing in their own rooms, postponing marriage and not having children. Yet both parents of both the middle class and the working class must work to maintain a lifestyle which is ever at the mercy of the dictates of capitalism and neoliberalism. If the family is the child's first fortress, his or her first line of defense against the slings and arrows of life, yet failing in its educational, moral, and protective functions, it may not be alarmist to say the family in Hong Kong is a troubled institution because the family has given up on a function society has allocated to it—that of socialization. The government must find ways to understand how and what the young in

Hong Kong think about the family in a capitalistic society in a globalized world.

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### **Conclusion: On the Practice of Politics as Revocation and Unbinding**

Let us draw this essay to a close by a recapitulation of its properly *philosophical* arguments. We have said, with Mao, that the One of consensual reality breaks into the Two of antagonistic conflict (Two irreconcilable conceptions of the One) without leading to any *return* to the original One (this conflict cannot be understood from *within* the dominant frame of reality, it calls this frame itself into question). This can be phrased in simple terms. If "society," as represented in the sociological imaginary, is a spatial distribution of fixed places, each of which is indexed to a certain functionality, then the theses that we have developed can be understood to be radically *antisocial* in nature.

The splitting of the One into Two cannot have any other meaning than this—the difference between our analysis and that of sociology is contingent upon *two different conceptions of the place*. From the perspective of sociology, the "youth" is a denumerable whole, an atomic part that relates to other parts in the social mechanism. This is what permits sociology to treat this part as a "problematic" malfunction in the systematic whole, a part that can be recalibrated and realigned so that the whole can be restored to its functional regularity. What sociology requires is a general *equivalence* between all of its parts insofar as they are parts. Though different in function, each part *relates* to others in a co-dependent way. The *whole* of society (which, as we have shown, is itself a part in the interlocking mechanisms of Integrated World Capitalism) enjoys an unquestioned supremacy over each of its parts. So, the "youth" are one part among many, a part that must be engineered and oriented in the direction of the whole. If society is a network of places, a purposive series of functions that prescribes and *policies* the boundaries of each place, we can say that the essence of society can be contained in the oft-repeated exhortation to "know your role." To know one's role is to internalize and reproduce the norms ascribed to one's assigned place, to



*stay in one's place* and make a home out of a prison sentence. The socialized being is above all else the *modest* being of self-limitation, affirming, in the form of absolute resignation, the finitude of one's power before the division of labor: "I accept the wisdom of my elders, I accept the judgment of experts, I accept the instruction of professors, I accept the calculations of technocrats."

It is no surprise, then, that insofar as we remain within the confines of this sociological imaginary, which spatializes the social strata and upholds the iron law of places, we will remain *incapable* of grasping the transversal process that every egalitarian politics puts in motion. We can liken sociology to the inheritance of a map, the territories and thresholds of which it enforces (why, if not because these territories are the very foundation of its existence, the categories that ensure its survival). True, sociology charts the migratory movements and shifts *between* these places, but it is unable to think the *demolition* and *revocation* of places that every emancipatory politics attempts to effect. Let us attempt to elaborate upon this point by reference to Marx's oft-misunderstood theoretical operator of the "class struggle," which has been obscured by generations of sociological misappropriation. The class struggle is *not*, as it is often conceived, a conflict between two empirically verifiable units of social reality (the capitalists, who own the implements and sites of production and the "working class") but a struggle over this very reality itself. If the class struggle and its unconditional demand for justice could be reduced to a mere haggling of interests, the reduction of exploitation, the lessening of the gap between the ruling classes and the exploited classes, we would *still be within the frame of capitalism and its constitutive vocabulary*. In short, the negativity of the class struggle would be given positive existence, contained within the institution of places (the introduction of identifiable "protagonists" in the dramaturgy of class struggle: the working class and the capitalist class) and their respective representatives (the state and the trade unions). Marxism would thereby be transformed into a progressive trade-unionist reformism, premised upon the redistribution of resources, the alleviation of the working man's burden. In such a conception, the Parts stay in their Place, though

the respective goods and rights allocated to them are subject to statist negotiation.

Marx, in his distinction between the "working class" (a sociological category that, through the procedures of social science, can be treated as a statistical variable) and the "proletariat" (a subjective, transversal construction that, as Marx told us, cuts across sociological categories by drawing intellectuals of bourgeois origin, working men and dedicated members of the poor together), designates the precise distance between the One of consensus and the One that, while originating from it, burrows single-mindedly through the frontiers erected by the social. Politics is the construction of a universally inclusive Place that ruins the legislated network of Places that it is inscribed in, the Part that attempts to embody a new Whole. This is why the proletariat is not a datum that can be verified empirically like "Pakistani immigrant workers," "Filipino domestic workers," or "Chinese students between the ages 15 and 20" but a collective force without definitive cosmetic marks of belonging or membership. It is in the body of this proletariat that the truth of absolute egalitarianism is incarnated and put into practice, that its consequences are probed, tested, and extrapolated. It is through its statements, formally addressed to all without exception, that its truth is transmitted through the proposal of new possibilities and modes of social relationship that are *imperceptible* from within the dominant frame of choice. In short, it insists upon its *singularity* by abolishing its *particularity*. It is the Place that, in denying its equivalence or comparability with every other Place, ruins the very *logic* of placement, equivalence and comparison that constitutes the social. A strong difference that subtracts itself from the network of weak differences, an *unmanageable* difference that breaks with its social background. This, we think, is how we should begin to think about the future that the Post-1980s Group proposes to us all.

To reclaim Marx, there is no donation of community anywhere, the market has revoked every sort of solidary bond, it has catalyzed a relentless ontological process that dissolves every communal identification. The youth in Hong Kong must start at the very beginning, to find one another, to demand a form of communal life in a series of

communal spaces—to create a new world, in a kafkaesque sort of hope with little hope.

The gravity of this essay needs not lead us to despair, panic or hysteria, as the triumph of men and women must prevail, a triumph of man over economic necessity as the singular motive of life and living.

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<sup>3</sup>While there are few actual citations in the body of this essay, its conception would have been unimaginable without the paths broken by the text in this bibliography.

## Conclusion: Meditations of Two Perpetual Outsiders on “Chineseness” and “The Family”

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Chan Nin and Chan Kwok-bun

He says no with his head  
But he says yes with his heart  
He says yes to what he loves  
He says no to the schoolmaster  
He's on his feet  
He's being questioned  
And all the problems are set  
Suddenly he's gripped with wild laughter  
And he erases it all  
Figures and words  
Dates and names  
Sentences and snares  
And despite the master's threats  
To the jeers of the infant prodigies  
With chalks of every colour  
On the blackboard of woe  
He draws the face of happiness  
— Jacques Prevert, “The Dunce”

In writing this piece, we must state my intellectual debt to Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari. Reading them has given us endless amounts of inspiration and joy. We have borrowed many concepts from them for this garrulous tract.

What does it mean to “be” Chinese or, for that matter, a Chinese family member? We address this question in our introduction to this handbook. Chan Kwok-bun addresses it again in Chap. 2 of this handbook when he is conceptualizing the

idea of the emergent identity of the Chinese cosmopolitan. With Chan Wai-wan, he revisits the question in Chap. 6 by examining the gender and generation politics in return migrant families in Hong Kong, while taking a perplexing look at the uncanny: feeling homely and unhomely during homecoming. To our minds, the question is a false one, and one of the foremost ethical and political duties of our time is to rephrase the question entirely. One would have thought that the existentialists had dispelled all varieties of essentialist humbug, but the point needs to be continually consolidated—being is precisely nothing, a *tabula rasa*.

To ask what it means to “be” is to remain at the puerile level of a Socratic dialogue. That is to say, asking “What is Chinese?” is scarcely different from “What is beauty?” or “What is truth?” Surely the proper question to ask is “Which beauty? Which truth? Whose beauty? Whose truth? *Whose Chineseness?*” This is perhaps Nietzsche's greatest contribution to philosophy, the absolute negation of transcendental values. It is Nietzsche who reveals the destitution of essences and who reduces truth, beauty and culture to little more than a series of subjective, amorphous discourses masquerading as eternally objective ideas. *Man thinks truth into being*, truth assumes the shape of thought. The implications of this are tremendous—if these notions are organic and historical, existing as long as men think them into existence, then it is hardly worthwhile to define them concretely. To realize this is to situate these discourses in the realm of *politics*,

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the dimension of *power*. If Chineseness is a discourse, it must be spoken by someone to have any meaning for our time. The question, as such, is "*Who speaks?*" We must speak for Chineseness or allow it to be spoken for. In other words, ideology is not democratic. To be silent is to be ventriloquized.

To speak, then, is to speak in a voice that is entirely one's own, a voice which aggressively separates itself from the vacuous jabber of the crowd, which refuses to be colonized or suppressed. To speak in this fashion, one must, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, "speak like a foreigner in one's own language", to make that speech one's own. In literature, we find innumerable examples of this—Kafka, the Czech expanding the possibilities of German expression; Conrad, the Pole transforming English prose; and Beckett, the Irishman who turned French inside out. Speaking as an individual is an artistic gesture as well as a political praxis. "Being" Chinese denotes nothing more than the pigmentation of one's skin, a cosmetic word that marks my ethnic situation. To confuse "being" Chinese with "becoming" Chinese, with "doing" Chinese, is to relinquish action, to abandon an artistic responsibility. To seize Chineseness and make it one's own is to transform a dogmatic myth into a dynamic poem. This is the difference between passivity and activity, between the unquestioning acquiescence to a received, static narrative and the active creation of the self.

This is not to say that we do not, as Chinese people, have an inherited cultural legacy. Certainly, the Chinese people boast a profound aesthetic and poetic legacy. This is something we would like to highlight above all else, that "Chineseness" is a poetic paradigm, a metaphor. To understand this, we would like to invoke the spectre of Goethe: "*as soon as one knows how to appropriate the world for himself, and to express it, he is a poet. Then he is inexhaustible, and can be ever new...Each new object truly recognized, opens a new organ within ourselves*". It is the notion of "inexhaustibility" that fascinates us, a concept that we find inextricable with the Chinese experience. What Goethe is trying to articulate is

the poverty of subjectivity, the vulgar dichotomy between poet and Nature, subject and object. It is in the sublimation of the subjective ego that rapture begins. At the same time, each poetic or artistic experience reveals another vista of life, a surge of feeling drawn from its bottomless reservoir. In going beyond ourselves, we come to understand that the frontiers of human experience are not as rigid as we imagine. Is this not the recurring theme of Song Dynasty painting? Infinitude and immanence, the disappearance and nullification of the enclosed self. Staring into Guo Xi's depthless crevasses, we vanish into the mist, if only for an indestructible instant.

So much has been written about the cultivated "passivity" of Chinese and Japanese art, the subdued contemplation that defines Eastern philosophy, that we have accepted stoic resignation as a hallmark of Chinese thinking. Traditionally, we conceive of the Chinese artist as a tablet upon which nature etches her exhortations. *Yet, all is not as it seems*. It is true that a horse painted by Qi Baishi is superficially different from a horse by Rembrandt. Western art typically employs the animal, the landscape, as an allegorical representation for subjective psychological states, violently transforming impermeable nature into an anthropomorphic metaphor. Between Rembrandt's tense, sinewy horses, Kaspar David Friedrich's phantasmal horizons and Baudelaire's poetry, there is an overarching aesthetic approach. It is assumed that nature and humanity are analogous, that nature is, if not reducible to human terms, a vast screen for the projections of imagination.

In contrast, Qi Baishi confronts nature in its irreducible alterity, its impenetrable inhumanity. To the Chinese painter, everything is worth painting—the bee, the silkworm, the caterpillar-gnawed leaf, the shrimp. There is no Faustian *hubris* here but an honest confrontation with the unknowable and a humble deference before it. It must be stressed that the word "confrontation" is significant. When Qi Baishi contemplates the butterfly or the peony, he is not merely observing, *he is becoming the butterfly in the process of painting it*, understanding it on its own terms, *becoming inhuman* (in the use of this term, we

owe a tremendous intellectual debt to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari).

To paint the butterfly truthfully is to create a rapport with the butterfly, to abandon oneself to communicate with the butterfly. In the artwork, an event is created, the artist transcending the limits of humanity, deposing the human artist from his despotic sovereignty. As the commemoration of a single event, a single becoming with a singular intensity, unrepeatable and historical, Qi Baishi's paintings are no different from Cezanne's or Monet's. *Becoming is never passive*, and bristling behind Qi Baishi's paintings is an effluvium of life, incandescent and insuppressible. Looking at a great Chinese painting is to realize that "*Chineseness*", so poetically expressed by Taoism and Chan Buddhism, *is a celebration of flux*, an active plunging of the self into the infinity of being, a *becoming inhuman*. Think back to the great Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai's "Green Mountain": "As the peach-blossom flows downstream and is gone into the unknown/I have a world apart that is not among men". Poetic apprehension is not passivity; it is pure dynamism, *an experiment on the self. To become Chinese is to become anything and everything, to always overflow and exceed oneself*.

In this respect, "Chineseness" is not fundamentally different from the American Transcendentalists; the French Symbolists and Surrealists; Wordsworth, Novalis, Holderlin, DH Lawrence, Henry Miller and Krishnamurti; and the Sufi mystics. It is a rather strange state of affairs that America and China have become ideological nemeses, when one can hardly think of a more "Chinese" poet than Walt Whitman. Listen to the exquisite polyphony of Whitman's "Song of Myself":

Oxen that rattle the yoke or halt in the shade, what is that you  
Express in your eyes?  
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.  
What is a man anyhow? What am I? and what are you?  
All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,  
Else it were time lost listening to me.

Henry Miller, the greatest Brooklynite in the history of letters:

My whole body must become a constant beam of light, moving with an ever greater rapidity ....  
Therefore I close my ears, my eyes, my mouth.  
Before I shall become quite man again, I shall probably exist as a park...

DH Lawrence's "Song of a Man Who Has Come Through":

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!  
The wind is blowing the new direction of Time.  
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!  
...Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,  
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,  
Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression.

Here's something from Paul Verlaine's "The Art of Poetry":

Let your line of verse be fortune's wanderer scattered in the taut morning wind that goes scented with mint and with thyme...

Poetry becoming like the wind, directionless and ephemeral. Poetry as a shaft of light, caressing the leaves and dancing on the undulating waves. Deleuze is very fond of quoting this passage from Spinoza: "The surprising thing is the body...we do not yet know what a body is capable of..." Science remains unable to explain mystical ecstasy, poetic rapture, and life always overruns conceptual thought. The human being is a pliant, supple instrument capable of infinite sonorities, infinite amplitudes, and poetry is the enunciation of this unending song of life, singing this hymn in one's own voice. Yet creation is not mimesis, mere repetition. It is a rupture of history, a pure present without precedent: think of Schoenberg, Francis Bacon, Rimbaud's *Illuminations*. *Creation is the refutation of given values, accepted standards*. It is not the confirmation of truth or beauty but a bringing of beauty into the world, a shifting and re-alignment of borders. In this way, art is always a gift, a giving of the self to the ceaseless spontaneity of existence and an affront to all human limitations. This is why the artist is allergic to petty categories like "Chineseness". While they are useful to the poet or understanding his sense of place, his cultural inheritance, he knows he will always surpass them. *No matter what identity others assign him, he knows he is continually becoming someone*,



*something else. If there is anything the Chinese poets taught us, it was precisely this.*

Why, then, is this surrender of subjectivity to multiplicity and this abandonment of identity to transience both poetry and politics? One must understand this on a number of levels. To become inhuman is to reject an established hierarchy that the human being is situated at the apex of creation. As such, it is the beginning of eco-politics. It is also to reject the cohesiveness of identity (are you with us or against us? a leftist or a rightist? on the inside or the outside? male or female? a patriot or a traitor? a citizen or an outsider? a Chinese or a non-Chinese?), to open a new space for the individual, for the possibility of becoming, beyond static binaries and dichotomies. This is what Deleuze calls a “plane of consistency”, a smooth space for freedom to flow, untrammelled by the striations and stratifications erected by race, gender, nationality, income bracket, etc. It is a wide open space for “Chineseness” to develop as an *ongoing poem* written by all, instead of an immutable grand narrative told to us by our fathers.

Now that “mobility” and “flexibility” have become the new mantras of managerial gurus and their sociological cheerleaders and scarcity of employment has given rise to the *lex biologica*, it is little surprise that “adaptability” has become the foremost trait of today’s corporate Bedouin. For those who cannot adapt themselves, there is always positive psychology, or antidepressants, or self-help books, or a healthy dose of gratuitous ultra-violence...It would be irresponsible for us to pluck the family from these turbid currents, especially when its ability to withstand such pressure is becoming increasingly doubtful. At any rate, all of this is hardly new. Belated as they may be, these words continue to ring clear in the atmosphere: “Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones...All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (Marx and Engels, in Marx 1974, p. 71).

Much would be positively useless if we had no idea what we should rethink, what we should eschew and what we should *create* in lieu of the hollow husks that litter our devastated polities. It seems evident that the nuclear family itself, so long an institution built upon the groaning, mute body of the mother, must be subjected to a *ruthless critique*. The resurgence of anthropology in radical thought, with the brilliant anarchist David Graeber (2007) spearheading its charge, has spurred lively debate on the prospects of a *post-revolutionary family*, as well as “*prefigurative attempts to embody new modes of social relationship in concrete practice*.” Besides this, the likes of Owen Hatherley (see his succinct and suggestive analysis of Wilhelm Reich, Sexpol and Dusan Makavejev in *Militant Modernism* [2009]) and Nina Power (2009) have called for a re-evaluation of attempts to *create new forms of extrafamilial community, communal relationships that would provide the premises for friendship, solidarity and love between genders and generations*. What this would require is a *historicization* of the nuclear family as it exists today rather than taking it for granted, particularly since it has always been involved in a contingent struggle between various alternatives, a struggle that may have resulted in its present hegemony but does not at all ensure it. The dubiousness of the “traditional” family, endlessly reinforced by ideological apparatuses and professional moralists, is even less defensible in the remarkable experiments in everyday life carried out by the most “backward” people, the peasants in the Spanish revolution, the feminist cadres in 1950s China and the Zapatistas in Mexico.

To suggest that man prefers order over upheaval and continuity over revolution is the typical rejoinder of the multiculturalist right to would-be radicals of all stripes. Today, when all attempts at security (which requires a pledge about the future) are unsettled by the miasma of the present, such an argument is scarcely sustainable. What if the question is no longer that of safeguarding the sanctuary of the family against the tempests of a cruel world, in trying desperately to introduce some semblance of stability to

chaos? What if this haphazard shielding of the “private” sphere requires, if it is to be anything more than the plugging of a hole-ridden vessel, *the constitution of a public space* in which collective anxieties, grievances and desires can be articulated and incarnated in a *collective and revolutionary fashion* (for instance, the creation of communal kitchens, communal child-rearing, communal fatherhood, communal schools)? What, after all, is revolution but the clamour for a *new order* and the painstaking, collaborative attempt to *piece it together*?

Adorno is quick to add:

It is not the purpose of critical thought to place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject. On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol. The purpose of *critical thought is to abolish the hierarchy*. (Adorno 1990, p. 181)

It is Adorno’s insistence upon the indispensability of the subject in philosophical and political thinking that attests to his unflinching belief in the *very possibility of politics*, a revolt against “the preponderance of the *objectified* in subjects which prevents them from *becoming subjects*” (Adorno 1990, p. 171, emphasis ours).

Our moral duty now is to identify points where politics *has a chance*. This politics, as we define it, is grounded upon the axiom of egalitarian inclusiveness, which presupposes the principle of a universality that, while acknowledging the irreducibility of differences, is articulated as a construction of the same. In philosophical terms, this would be a concrete universality, a hegemonic front. For those who suggest that this intransigent insistence upon an egalitarian, communal politics can only lead to totalitarian terror, a regression to the worst, we would suggest that the stalemate of liberal-democratic consensus, as the technocratic legitimization of the most unconscionable rapacity and discrimination, is already the inferno that it seeks to exorcise. In this regard, it would do us well to read the beautiful paragraph that closes Calvino’s (1997, p. 148) *Invisible Cities*:

And Polo said: The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is

already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to *recognize who and what, in the midst of inferno*, are not inferno, then make them *endure, give them space* (emphasis ours).

To close this long handbook on the Chinese family, finally, we suggest to attempt a shift in vision, toward a new vision and a new scholarship—by bringing gender and age back to the centre stage in studying family life, somewhat like what Chan Kwok-bun and C.S. Seet have done in Chap. 3 when they speak of disgruntled wives reluctantly following their husbands to migrate to Singapore from China, or in Chap. 18 where Chan offers an intimate and sympathetic narrative of how sons and daughters talk about their fathers, fatherhood, marriage and work. Love between parents and children, husbands and wives, men and women is complicated, obstructed and corrupted by unequal balance of power. Love is not pure. Love is entangled with oppression, exploitation, domination, thus the doubleness of family life: love on the one hand, and power on the other, or two sides of the same coin.

Family research indeed is a moral enterprise, in that one must force an analytical shift away from the taken-for-granted, the natural, the given, and toward alternative ways of arranging family life, toward options, choice, possibilities and their construction. As Hegel would stress it, the world is the unity of the constructed and the given, while psychiatrist RD Laing would stress the possibility of the person constructing the given, pointing the way to emerging ideas about family life in terms of what it ought to be, should be and will be, thus the morality of thought. What must be embedded in this new vision is a truly democratic gender and generation order in the family as democracy begins at home; a condition that does not favour male and age-based authority but listens to his voices, his pains, understanding him, loving him, consoling his hidden injuries (of class), helping and supporting

him; and a mode of operation that does not favour a particular familial, marital and intergenerational arrangement.

All inventions begin with imagination. What you cannot imagine would not happen. What you can would. A sociology of the family and marriage must be a moral enterprise that strives to articulate a thinkable vision of the family and hold it in view, firmly. As sociologist Peter Berger (1963) put it, not only is the (family, society) world not what it appears to be, but it could be—and must be—different from what it is. Appearance is deceptive—and destructive. The world is makeable. It must be. It will be.

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